

VETourismo

CURRICULUM

VETourismo

ADVANCING DIGITAL AND SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN AGRO-TOURISM FOR VETS

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Executive Summary

The VETourismo Curriculum is the main result of Work Package 2 of the VETourismo Erasmus+ project. It integrates eight sub-modules, grouped into four thematic modules, into one vocational learning pathway for agro-tourism: Sustainable Agro-Tourism & Environmental Stewardship, Digitalisation & Smart Technologies, Entrepreneurship & Business Development, and Cultural Heritage & Community-Based Tourism.

The curriculum is evidence-based. Its content responds directly to the WP2 Transnational Synthesis Report (D2.1), which drew on 229 questionnaire responses and 58 focus group participants in Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Romania. The eight training needs identified in D2.1 are each addressed by at least two sub-modules, as documented in the traceability matrix in Section 4.

All sub-modules share a common ten-section learning architecture, a practical and competence-based approach, at least one operationally explained digital tool, an explicit sustainability link and an applied assessment. The complete pathway corresponds to a recommended learning time of approximately 62 hours and can be delivered in full, as a shorter upskilling programme, or module by module, in online, blended, classroom, workshop or work-based formats. Each sub-module is accompanied by a short video resource and will be hosted on the VETourismo e-learning platform (WP3).

Coherence and relevance are documented through a sub-module learning outcomes matrix, an alignment with the European competence frameworks GreenComp, DigComp 2.2 and EntreComp, and a common assessment framework. Quality was assured through paired peer review of every sub-module and an integration check by the WP2 lead. A second, practical level of validation with VET learners, trainers, rural entrepreneurs and agro-tourism businesses will take place during the WP4 pilot implementation.

1. Introduction

The VETourismo Curriculum is a vocational learning programme designed to strengthen the knowledge, skills and practical competences required for contemporary agro-tourism.

Agro-tourism brings together agriculture, tourism, entrepreneurship, environmental responsibility, digital technologies and the cultural and social resources of rural communities. Successful agro-tourism therefore requires competences that go beyond traditional agricultural or tourism training. Operators and future professionals need to understand how to manage resources responsibly, use digital technologies, develop viable business activities, respond to visitor expectations and create experiences rooted in local identity and community participation.

The curriculum brings these dimensions together within one structured learning pathway composed of four complementary modules, each containing two specialised sub-modules. The eight sub-modules were developed and cross-reviewed by partner organisations working in pairs within the same thematic pillar.

This document is the curriculum framework. It explains the purpose, evidence base, structure, learning outcomes, workload, delivery options, assessment and quality assurance of the curriculum. The eight sub-modules are provided in full as Annexes A to H.

2. Purpose of the Curriculum

The purpose of the VETourismo Curriculum is to provide a structured, accessible and practice-oriented learning pathway for vocational education and training in agro-tourism.

The curriculum connects four areas that are closely interrelated in professional agro-tourism practice: sustainability, digital transformation, entrepreneurship and community-based rural tourism. Rather than approaching these areas separately, it enables learners to understand how they interact within a real agro-tourism activity. Environmental responsibility influences how rural resources are managed and presented to visitors. Digital tools support promotion, communication, management and visitor engagement. Entrepreneurial competences turn resources and ideas into viable products and services. Local gastronomy, heritage and community participation create authentic experiences and strengthen the link between tourism and rural development.

The curriculum is designed as an integrated learning pathway while remaining flexible: individual modules or sub-modules can be used independently according to specific training needs.

3. Target Groups and Entry Requirements

The VETourismo Curriculum addresses a mixed vocational audience, reflecting the reality of the agro-tourism sector, in which learners, trainers and practitioners often share the same learning needs.

The first group consists of VET learners and trainees in agriculture, tourism, hospitality and related fields. Their programmes usually treat agriculture and tourism as separate disciplines, while agro-tourism requires the two to be combined with business, digital and sustainability skills. The curriculum offers them this integrated perspective and a set of practical outputs that can be used in internships and future employment.

The second group are VET trainers and educators. For them, the curriculum is a ready-to-use but adaptable teaching resource: each sub-module provides background content, step-by-step activities, case studies and assessment tasks that can be introduced into existing programmes without redesigning them.

The third group includes agro-tourism operators, farmers considering tourism diversification, rural entrepreneurs and tourism and hospitality service providers. For this group, the curriculum works as continuing professional development that is closely tied to daily business decisions, such as pricing an experience, improving online visibility or building local partnerships.

Finally, the curriculum gives particular attention to people with fewer opportunities in rural areas, including rural youth and women. The WP2 research confirmed the importance of this group: people with fewer opportunities represented 52% of questionnaire respondents in Greece, 74% in Croatia and over 40% in Portugal. For them, flexible, low-cost and locally accessible learning formats are a precondition for participation.

No formal prerequisites are required. The content is written in plain language and is indicatively suited to learners at EQF levels 3 to 5; trainers can adapt the depth of the activities to the level of each group. Basic use of a smartphone or computer is sufficient to start the digital activities, which are introduced step by step.

4. Evidence Base: From Training Needs to Curriculum

The curriculum is built on the WP2 Insights and Needs Analysis. Between January and April 2026, the seven partner countries carried out desk research, a common online questionnaire (229 responses) and nine focus group sessions (58 participants). The results were consolidated in the Transnational Synthesis Report (D2.1), which identified eight recurring training needs. These eight needs were adopted as the design reference for all sub-modules: the needs addressed by each sub-module are shown in Table 1 and in the module information sheet that introduces each sub-module on the VETourismo e-learning platform, and every need is covered by at least two sub-modules

Table 1. Traceability matrix: WP2 training needs and the sub-modules that address them

WP2 training need(D2.1)	Selected evidence from D2.1	Addressed bysub-modules
Low digital skills among agro-tourism operators	Lack of digital skills among rural operators rated 4.08/5 (Croatia) and 4.04/5 (Italy); reported in all seven countries	1.1, 2.1, 2.2, 3.2
Weak online visibility and digital marketing capacity	Importance of digital skills 4.44/5 (Croatia), 4.5/5 (Greece), 4.12/5 (Italy); digital marketing named as a key gap in all countries	2.1, 2.2, 3.2
Overly theoretical VET programmes	Existing training described as too theoretical or disconnected from daily business in the national reports	1.1, 1.2, 4.1
Limited practical learning and work-based exposure	Practical operational experience identified as a skills shortage in all seven countries	1.1, 2.2, 3.1, 4.1, 4.2
Weak entrepreneurial and customer service competences	Importance of entrepreneurial skills 4.6/5 (Greece), 4.48/5 (Italy), 4.37/5 (Croatia)	3.1, 3.2, 4.1
Limited operational understanding of sustainability	Importance of sustainability skills 4.3/5 (Greece), 4.15/5 (Croatia), 4.00/5 (Italy), against training coverage of 2.9/5 (Greece) and 2.52/5 (Italy)	1.1, 1.2
Weak cooperation between VET providers and businesses	School–business cooperation rated 2.93/5 in Croatia; described as poor to moderate in the Greek focus group and as limited in several other countries	1.2, 3.1, 4.2
Limited access to training in rural and remote areas	Access to training for people with fewer opportunities rated 3.00/5 (Croatia), 3.1/5 (Greece) and 2.48/5 (Italy); distance to training centres stressed in Greece, Italy, Bulgaria and Portugal	2.1, 4.2 (and blended delivery across the curriculum)

The same evidence also shaped the design principles of the curriculum: practice-oriented content, free or low-cost digital tools suitable for small rural businesses, blended and mobile-friendly delivery for learners in remote areas, and assessment based on realistic agro-tourism tasks.

5. Curriculum Aim and Learning Outcomes

5.1Overall aim

The overall aim of the VETourismo Curriculum is to strengthen the environmental, digital, entrepreneurial, customer-oriented and community-based competences needed to develop, manage and improve

sustainable agro-tourism activities, and to enable learners to connect these competence areas in realistic rural tourism contexts.

5.2Curriculumlearningoutcomes

On completion of the full VETourismo Curriculum, learners will be able to:

Apply sustainable agro-tourism practices that support responsible resource use, environmental stewardship, biodiversity protection and climate adaptation.

Use digital technologies and tools to improve the promotion, communication, management and visitor experience of an agro-tourism business.

Develop viable agro-tourism business ideas using business-planning, pricing and financial approaches.

Design and improve customer experiences according to visitor needs, service quality and the characteristics of the business.

Integrate local food, gastronomy, traditions and cultural identity into authentic agro-tourism experiences.

Engage communities and local stakeholders in rural tourism activities that support participation and shared value.

Connect environmental, digital, economic and social considerations when planning or improving an agro-tourism activity.

Apply practical tools, methods and problem-solving approaches to realistic situations in the agro-tourism sector.

6. Curriculum Structure and Workload

The curriculum consists of four thematic modules and eight sub-modules. Table 2 shows the sub-modules, the partners responsible for their development and review, and the recommended learning time (indicative; trainers may adjust it to the learner group). The learning time includes self-study, trainer-led sessions, practical exercises and assessment.

Table 2. Curriculum structure

Module	No.	Sub-module	Development partner	Review partner	Recommended learning time
1. Sustainable Agro-Tourism & Environmental Stewardship	1.1	Sustainable Agro-Tourism	uDevelop (DE)	iAgroCert (EL)	4 h
	1.2	Environmental Stewardship	iAgroCert (EL)	uDevelop (DE)	6 h
2. Digitalisation & Smart Technologies in Agro-Tourism	2.1	Digital Marketing for Agro-Tourism Operators	PORC (HR)	DEULA (DE)	7 h
	2.2	Smart Technologies for Agro-Tourism	DEULA (DE)	PORC (HR)	7 h
3. Entrepreneurship & Business Development	3.1	Entrepreneurship	Slow Tourism (IT)	BCCI (BG)	15 h

Module	No.	Sub-module	Development partner	Review partner	Recommended learning time
	3.2	Business Development & Customer Experience	BCCI (BG)	Slow Tourism (IT)	9 h
4. Cultural Heritage & Community-Based Tourism	4.1	Local Identity & Gastronomy	LTT Călimănești (RO)	CEPROF (PT)	8 h
	4.2	Community-Based Tourism	CEPROF (PT)	LTT Călimănești (RO)	6 h
Total		Complete learning pathway			approx. 62 h

7. Curriculum Learning Pathway

The four modules form a progressive pathway that moves from the environmental foundations of agro-tourism to digital capacity, business development and, finally, the integration of local identity and community participation:

Sustainable Resources → Digital Capacity → Viable Business & Customer Experience → Local Identity & Community Value

Module 1: Sustainable Agro-Tourism & Environmental Stewardship

Module 1 establishes the environmental foundation. Sub-module 1.1 shows how sustainability becomes a set of daily operational decisions, from designing a costed visitor offer to closing circular loops on the farm. Sub-module 1.2 focuses on the protection of the natural resources on which agro-tourism depends: biodiversity, soil, water, climate adaptation and certification.

Module 2: Digitalisation & Smart Technologies in Agro-Tourism

Module 2 develops digital capacity. Sub-module 2.1 builds the online visibility of the business through Google Business Profile, social media, content planning, reputation management and basic analytics. Sub-module 2.2 extends digital competence to the whole visitor journey, including QR-code learning trails, digital feedback and demonstrations of smart farming technologies.

Module 3: Entrepreneurship & Business Development

Module 3 turns resources and ideas into viable businesses. Sub-module 3.1 covers business models, pricing, break-even analysis, cash-flow planning, revenue diversification and EU rural development funding. Sub-module 3.2 links business growth to customer experience, direct bookings, culinary storytelling and simple customer-management tools.

Module 4: Cultural Heritage & Community-Based Tourism

Module 4 roots agro-tourism in place and community. Sub-module 4.1 shows how local food, recipes, seasonal menus and traditions become packaged visitor experiences. Sub-module 4.2 widens the perspective from the single business to the community, covering asset mapping, stakeholder engagement, partnerships and shared visitor routes.

7.1Cross-references betweensub-modules

Some tools and topics appear in more than one sub-module. To avoid repetition, each is introduced in full once and then applied in later sub-modules for a different purpose:

Tool or topic	Introduced in	Applied later in
Google Business Profile	2.1 (full step-by-step set-up)	2.2 (visitor information across the journey), 3.2 (direct bookings and reviews), 4.1 (visibility of food experiences)
Visitor journey	1.1 (six stages)	2.2 (technologies at each stage), 3.2 (customer experience mapping)
Pricing and costing	1.1 (price per session)	3.1 (break-even and cash flow), 4.1 (pricing a gastronomy package)
Canva	2.1 (branded templates)	2.2 (visitor maps and QR posters)
Google My Maps	4.1 (local product map)	4.2 (community tourism routes)
Data protection (GDPR)	2.1 (practical rules)	2.2 (feedback and photographs), 3.2 (customer data and CRM)

8. Sub-module Learning Outcomes, Tools and Assessment

Table 3 summarises the intended learning outcomes of each sub-module, the main digital tools used and the assessment methods. Full details are provided in the sub-modules in Annexes A to H.

Table 3. Learning outcomes matrix

Sub-module	Learners will be able to…	Main digital tools	Assessment
1.1 Sustainable Agro-Tourism	define sustainable agro-tourism and its environmental, social and economic dimensions select a suitable visitor segment for a farm design a costed agro-tourism offer apply at least two circular economy loops calculate and communicate the environmental footprint of a visit	myclimate.org calculator; EU Ecolabel self-assessment	Knowledge quiz (10 questions); sustainability audit exercise
1.2 Environmental Stewardship	identify biodiversity assets and their visitor value apply land-use zoning and soil-health practices carry out a simple water audit implement climate-resilient practices communicate certification and environmental values to visitors	eAmbrosia (EU geographical indications register); iNaturalist	Knowledge quiz (10 questions); design of a Nature & Farm Trail
2.1 Digital Marketing	set up and optimise an online presence create content with free tools choose platforms and plan a 4-week content calendar manage reviews and apply GDPR in practice use basic analytics to improve decisions	Google Business Profile; Meta Business Suite; Canva; Mailchimp; Google Analytics	Knowledge check (8 questions); practical assignment with rubric
2.2 Smart Technologies	analyse the visitor journey apply QR codes, feedback forms and online visibility tools design digital solutions for visitors develop a technology improvement plan evaluate the benefits and limits of technologies	Google Business Profile; Google Forms; QR code generator; Canva; ThingLink	Smart Agro-Tourism Technology Improvement Plan with weighted criteria
3.1 Entrepreneurship	apply a business model to an agro-tourism context structure a simple business plan analyse costs, pricing, break-even and cash flow design revenue diversification identify EU rural funding and basic legal requirements	Business Model Canvas (Strategyzer, Miro or Canva); cash-flow template	Business Rescue Challenge (scenario analysis); Business Model Canvas pitch
3.2 Business Development & Customer Experience	establish and manage the business's digital identity design customer experiences using storytelling use simple website, survey and CRM tools automate feedback and review collection	Google Business Profile; Webnode or Wix; Google Forms; Typeform; HubSpot CRM (free)	Knowledge test; visitor journey mapping and service improvement plan

Sub-module	Learners will be able to…	Main digital tools	Assessment
4.1 Local Identity & Gastronomy	analyse the local identity resources of a destination design a farm-to-table package with a story, logistics and price range apply at least two digital tools for promotion evaluate economic, social and environmental impact	Instagram; Google Business Profile; Google My Maps; QR recipe cards	Practical kitchen challenge; work-based learning portfolio; quiz
4.2 Community-Based Tourism	identify cultural, natural and social community assets map and engage stakeholders design community-based experiences apply ethical tourism principles use digital mapping to promote experiences	Google My Maps	Mini-project with competence checklist and presentation

9. Alignment with European Competence Frameworks

To demonstrate its contribution to the green and digital transitions and to entrepreneurial learning, the curriculum has been mapped against the three European reference frameworks developed by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre. Using these frameworks allows VET providers to position the VETourismo sub-modules within their own competence-based programmes and supports the alignment of the curriculum with the European Green Deal, the Digital Education Action Plan and the European Skills Agenda.

GreenComp, the European sustainability competence framework, describes twelve competences in four areas: embodying sustainability values, embracing complexity in sustainability, envisioning sustainable futures and acting for sustainability. DigComp 2.2, the Digital Competence Framework for Citizens, organises digital competence into five areas: information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, digital content creation, safety and problem solving. EntreComp, the Entrepreneurship Competence Framework, defines fifteen competences grouped into three areas: ideas and opportunities, resources, and into action.

Table 4 shows the main contribution of each sub-module. Module 1 contributes mainly to GreenComp, Module 2 to DigComp and Module 3 to EntreComp, while Module 4 draws on all three frameworks by combining community values, digital communication and entrepreneurial creativity. This distribution confirms that the three frameworks are covered across the curriculum as a whole rather than in isolated units.

Table 4. Main contribution of each sub-module to GreenComp, DigComp 2.2 and EntreComp

Sub-module	GreenComp	DigComp 2.2	EntreComp
1.1	Promoting nature; systems thinking; adaptability; individual initiative	Information and data literacy (carbon calculation)	Financial and economic literacy; valuing ideas
1.2	Promoting nature; systems thinking; individual initiative	Information and data literacy (eAmbrosia, iNaturalist)	Ethical and sustainable thinking
2.1	–	Communication and collaboration; digital content creation; safety (data protection); information and	Mobilising others

Sub-module	GreenComp	DigComp 2.2	EntreComp
2.2	Systems thinking (smart farming and resource efficiency)	data literacy (analytics) Problem solving; digital content creation; information and data literacy	Planning and management
3.1	Futures literacy (seasonality and resilience)	Problem solving (digital planning tools)	Spotting opportunities; valuing ideas; financial and economic literacy; mobilising resources; planning and management
3.2	–	Communication and collaboration; digital content creation; information and data literacy (feedback and CRM)	Spotting opportunities; working with others; learning through experience
4.1	Valuing sustainability; promoting nature (seasonality, local sourcing)	Digital content creation (storytelling, maps)	Creativity; vision; valuing ideas
4.2	Supporting fairness; collective action	Digital content creation; communication and collaboration (shared maps)	Mobilising others; working with others

10. Common Learning Structure

All VETourismo sub-modules follow a common learning architecture of ten sections, defined in the WP2 Module Development Guide. This shared structure makes the sub-modules easy to navigate and allows them to function as parts of one curriculum.

Section	Purpose
1. Introduction	Relevance of the topic for agro-tourism and a practical scenario
2. Learning Objectives	What learners will be able to do, linked to the WP2 needs addressed
3. Practical Background	Essential concepts, kept concise and practice-oriented
4. Practical Application	The core of the sub-module: step-by-step guidance, templates and checklists
5. Case Study	A real or clearly labelled illustrative example from a rural or agro-tourism context
6. Interactive Exercise	A task in which learners solve a problem or produce a practical output
7. Digital Tool	At least one tool explained operationally, including cost and limitations
8. Sustainability Link	Environmental, social, economic or circular implications of the topic
9. Key Takeaways	Main learning points and practical recommendations
10. Assessment	Competence-based assessment: quiz, assignment, scenario analysis or mini-project

11. Teaching and Learning Approach

The VETourismo Curriculum follows a learner-centred, practical and competence-oriented approach. It is not a traditional academic textbook: the emphasis is on the learner's ability to use knowledge in realistic agro-tourism situations.

The learning process combines concise background information, practical examples, step-by-step guidance, case studies, problem-solving activities, digital tools, business and operational exercises, sustainability applications, reflection and competence-based assessment. Learners are encouraged throughout to apply each topic to an existing or planned farm, rural business or community tourism activity, moving from understanding to application and from application to practical solutions.

Trainers act primarily as facilitators of applied learning. Guidance for trainers is provided in Section 16.

12. Flexible Delivery and Learning Resources

12.1 Delivery formats

The curriculum has been designed so that the same content can be delivered in different learning environments. In online learning, learners work independently on the VETourismo e-learning platform, with or without trainer support, which is particularly suitable for operators who cannot leave their farms during the working season. In classroom learning, a VET trainer facilitates the concepts, examples and exercises, making the curriculum easy to integrate into existing school programmes.

Workshops allow learners to collaborate on the practical tasks, scenarios and business challenges contained in each sub-module, and are the preferred format for the exercises that involve role-play, pitching or group design. Blended learning combines digital self-study with trainer-led sessions and practical activities; it is the recommended default for most sub-modules because it reflects the preference for flexible, practice-oriented formats expressed in the WP2 research. Finally, work-based learning connects selected exercises and assignments to a real farm, rural enterprise or tourism environment, for example through the practical training portfolio of sub-module 4.1 or the application of the sustainability audit of sub-module 1.1 to a host business.

12.2 Implementationmodels

Training providers may deliver the complete pathway or select the modules that best match their learners' needs. Three implementation models are suggested as examples:

Model	Duration	Suggested content
A. Full VETourismo pathway	approx. 62 h (e.g. one semester or 8–10 weeks)	All eight sub-modules in sequence; providers may add a final project that combines the Business Model Canvas (3.1) with a digital (2.1/2.2) and a community (4.2) component
B. Short upskilling programme for operators	approx. 20–25 h	1.1, 2.1, 3.1 (selected parts) and 3.2, delivered as blended learning with evening or weekend workshops
C. Stand-alone modules	4–15 h per sub-module	Any sub-module used independently to complement existing VET programmes, e.g. 2.1 in a tourism course or 1.2 in an agriculture course

12.3 Video and digital resources

Each sub-module is accompanied by a short video resource that introduces the topic, presents practical examples and supports self-study. The videos and the full curriculum will be hosted on the VETourismo e-learning platform developed in WP3, together with the 360° virtual farm tours. The video resources are listed in Annex I.

13. Integrated Competence Areas

Together, the four modules develop seven complementary competence areas that correspond to the combined profile of a modern agro-tourism professional.

Environmental competence enables learners to recognise the environmental impacts of visitor activities, to manage soil, water, energy and biodiversity responsibly and to integrate sustainability into daily operations. Digital competence enables them to select and use digital technologies for promotion, communication, business operations and visitor engagement, with a focus on free and simple tools that match the scale of small rural businesses.

Entrepreneurial competence covers the ability to identify opportunities, structure business ideas, assess financial viability and turn rural resources into marketable products and services. It is complemented by customer experience competence, which enables learners to understand visitor expectations, improve service quality and design experiences that visitors remember, recommend and book again.

Cultural and local identity competence refers to the responsible use of gastronomy, traditions, local products and cultural resources within tourism experiences, while community and collaboration competence enables learners to identify stakeholders, work with local actors and design activities that involve and benefit the wider community. Across all modules, learners also develop problem-solving and adaptability: they analyse realistic situations, weigh alternatives and select solutions that are feasible for the size, budget and context of a small agro-tourism business.

13.1 Digital transformationacrossthecurriculum

Although Module 2 focuses specifically on digital marketing and smart technologies, digital tools are used across all modules according to their practical function: carbon calculation and biodiversity monitoring in Module 1; online visibility, content creation, analytics and visitor-journey technologies in Module 2; business-planning, website, survey and CRM tools in Module 3; and storytelling and digital mapping in Module 4. All tools selected are free or have a free tier, so that small rural businesses can apply them without investment. Digital competence is therefore treated as a practical cross-curricular capability rather than a stand-alone technical subject.

13.2 Sustainabilityacross thecurriculum

Sustainability is a cross-cutting principle rather than the responsibility of a single module. Module 1 provides the strongest environmental focus; Module 3 develops economic sustainability through viability, pricing and diversification; and Module 4 strengthens social sustainability through local identity, fair distribution of benefits and community participation. In addition, every sub-module contains a dedicated Sustainability Link section that explains the environmental, economic, social or circular implications of its topic.

13.3 Industryandprofessional relevance

Across the four modules, learners work on tasks that occur in real rural enterprises and produce practical outputs rather than reproducing theory. Examples include a sustainability audit and a costed visitor offer,

a Nature & Farm Trail, a 4-week content calendar and a Google Business Profile description, a smart technology improvement plan, a Business Model Canvas and business rescue analysis, a customer journey improvement plan, a local gastronomy package and a community-based agro-tourism route. Case studies are drawn from partner countries, including Germany, Greece, Croatia, Italy, Bulgaria, Romania and Portugal.

14. Accessibility and Inclusion

Accessibility and inclusion are built into the design of the curriculum rather than added as a separate topic. This responds directly to the WP2 finding that access to training is limited in rural and remote areas, and to the project's commitment that at least 35% of participants should come from underrepresented groups. The first level of accessibility is pedagogical. All sub-modules follow the same structure and begin with clear learning objectives, so that learners always know what to expect. The content is written in plain language, technical terms are explained when they first appear, and every practical activity is supported by step-by-step instructions, templates or checklists. Most exercises can be completed individually, in pairs or in groups, so that self-paced learners and sole operators can use them as well as classroom groups.

The second level is digital. All digital tools used in the curriculum are free or have a free tier and can be operated from a smartphone, which removes cost as a barrier for small businesses. Short video resources support learners with lower literacy or limited time, and the curriculum will be hosted on a mobile-friendly e-learning platform in WP3.

The third level is organisational. Flexible online, blended, classroom, workshop and work-based delivery reduces the need to travel and allows learning to be scheduled around agricultural work. In addition, the curriculum framework and the sub-modules will be translated into all partner languages (Bulgarian, Croatian, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese and Romanian) following pilot-based refinement.

During implementation, trainers play a decisive role in maintaining accessibility. They should demonstrate digital tools before learners use them independently, offer additional support to learners with limited digital experience, provide non-digital alternatives where appropriate and choose examples that are meaningful in the learners' own rural context.

15. Assessment Framework

Assessment is integrated throughout the curriculum and focuses on what learners can do with their knowledge, not only on what they know. Each sub-module combines one or more of the following methods: knowledge checks and quizzes, practical assignments, scenario analysis, interactive exercises, business-planning tasks, digital improvement plans, presentations, portfolios, self-assessment and mini- projects (see Table 3).Knowledge quizzes are delivered and marked automatically on the VETourismo e-learning platform; the practical assessment is included in Section 10 of each sub-module

15.1 Recommendedcompletioncriteria

The following completion criteria are recommended to training providers. A sub-module can be considered successfully completed when the learner:

1.participates in the learning activities and completes the interactive exercise;

2.achieves at least 60% in the knowledge-based part of the assessment, where one is used; and

3. reaches at least a “satisfactory” level in the practical assessment, according to the criteria or rubric of the sub-module.

Learners who complete all eight sub-modules have completed the full VETourismo pathway. Training providers may issue a certificate of completion that lists the sub-modules completed and the corresponding learning outcomes. The learning outcomes in Table 3 can also be used by providers who wish to recognise the training within their own programmes.

16. Guidance for VET Trainers and Educators

The curriculum can be delivered as a complete learning pathway or adapted to existing VET programmes. Before delivering a sub-module, trainers should review its learning objectives, practical activities, digital tools and assessment, and decide whether adaptations are needed for the learner group, for example in the choice of case studies, the depth of the financial exercises or the time allocated to digital practice. The most effective way to use the curriculum is to connect its activities with the learners’ own environment. Learners who already work on a farm or in rural tourism can apply the exercises directly to their business, so that the outputs of the course, such as a costed offer, a content calendar or a Business Model Canvas, become working documents. Learners without professional experience can work with the case studies included in the sub-modules or develop a realistic fictional business, which they can then carry through several sub-modules.

Digital tools should be demonstrated in practice rather than described theoretically. Learners should have the opportunity to test each tool during the session and to discuss whether it suits different types and sizes of agro-tourism business. Group activities are particularly valuable when learners from agricultural, tourism and business backgrounds work together, as they reproduce the cooperation that agro-tourism requires in reality.

Trainers are also encouraged to make the links between sub-modules visible, for instance by reusing the costed offer from sub-module 1.1 in the Business Model Canvas of sub-module 3.1, or the local product map from sub-module 4.1 in the community route of sub-module 4.2. Inviting local agro-tourism operators as guest speakers or host sites strengthens both the practical relevance of the training and the cooperation between VET providers and businesses, one of the needs identified in WP2. Finally, collecting short feedback from learners at the end of each sub-module supports the continuous improvement of the curriculum.

Throughout, the trainer acts primarily as a facilitator of applied learning, helping learners to connect the content with practical decisions and professional situations.

17. Curriculum Coherence

The curriculum is built around one professional context: the development of sustainable, digitally capable, economically viable and locally rooted agro-tourism. Each module contributes a different but complementary answer to this challenge. Module 1 asks how agro-tourism can use and protect the environmental resources on which it depends. Module 2 asks how digital technologies can help to communicate, manage and improve the agro-tourism offer. Module 3 asks how this offer can become a viable business that responds to customer needs, and Module 4 asks how agro-tourism can remain connected to the food, culture, people and communities that give rural destinations their identity.

ENVIRONMENT + TECHNOLOGY + BUSINESS + COMMUNITY

None of these dimensions works in isolation. A sustainable farm experience still needs to reach visitors; a digitally visible business still needs a viable business model; a profitable activity must consider its environmental impact and its relationship with the community; and an authentic community experience needs organisation, promotion and economic viability. Coherence is ensured in practice by the traceability matrix (Section 4), the shared learning structure (Section 10), the cross-references between sub-modules (Section 7.1) and the common assessment framework (Section 15).



18. Quality Assurance and Validation

The curriculum is validated in two stages. This document concludes the first stage, the development validation within WP2. The second stage, pilot validation with the target groups, takes place in WP4.

18.1 WP2 development validation

The development validation followed four steps:

1. **Common framework.** All partners developed their sub-modules using the WP2 Module Development Guide and a common template, which define the ten mandatory sections, the use of the WP2 findings and the quality criteria.
2. **Paired peer review.** Each sub-module was reviewed by the partner developing the other sub-module of the same module, using the common peer review checklist (Table 5).
3. **Revision.** Development partners revised their sub-modules in response to the peer review.
4. **Integration check.** The WP2 lead (uDevelop) reviewed all sub-modules against the D2.1 evidence and against each other for consistency, overlaps, terminology and assessment accuracy, and defined harmonisation requirements for the final versions.

Table 5. Peer review checklist (applied to every sub-module)

No.	Criterion
1	All ten mandatory sections are included and in the correct order
2	The sub-module addresses at least two to three WP2 findings
3	Learning objectives are measurable and practical
4	The practical application section is the strongest and most detailed part
5	The case study is realistic and connected to the theme
6	The interactive exercise asks learners to solve a real task
7	At least one digital tool is explained operationally
8	The sustainability link is practical and relevant
9	The assessment checks competence and not only recall of facts
10	Branding, layout, headings, footer and tables are consistent with the template
11	References and image credits are included
12	Language is clear and suitable for VET learners

Table 6. Peer review overview

Sub-module	Title	Developed by	Reviewed by	Peer review
1.1	Sustainable Agro-Tourism	uDevelop	iAgroCert	Completed; revisions integrated
1.2	Environmental Stewardship	iAgroCert	uDevelop	Completed; revisions integrated
2.1	Digital Marketing	PORC	DEULA	Completed June 2026: approve with minor revisions; revisions

Sub-module	Title	Developed by	Reviewed by	Peer review
				integrated
2.2	Smart Technologies	DEULA	PORC	Completed June 2026: approve with minor revisions; revisions integrated
3.1	Entrepreneurship	Slow Tourism	BCCI	Completed; revisions integrated
3.2	Business Development & Customer Experience	BCCI	Slow Tourism	Completed; revisions integrated
4.1	Local Identity & Gastronomy	LTT	CEPROF	Completed; revisions integrated
4.2	Community-Based Tourism	CEPROF	LTT	Completed; revisions integrated

18.2 Examplesof revisionsfollowingpeer review

The peer reviews led to concrete improvements. Two examples illustrate the process:

- **Sub-module 2.1 (reviewed by DEULA):** a new section on content for five types of agro-tourism business was added to broaden the examples beyond wine tourism; platform selection was reframed around target audience and business type; a practical section on GDPR and data protection was added; sources were added for all statistics; the sustainability section was extended to printed-material reduction and local value chains; and a four-criterion assessment rubric was introduced.
- **Sub-module 2.2 (reviewed by PORC):** a section on integrating smart farming technologies (smart irrigation, weather stations, GPS-guided machinery, soil sensors, drones and livestock monitoring) was added; the case study was given a regional setting and indicative figures; an individual variant was added to the group exercise; a comparison table was added for the secondary digital tools; and a GDPR reminder was included.

18.3 Integration check and harmonisation

The integration check carried out by the WP2 lead examined the eight sub-modules as one curriculum rather than as separate documents.It confirmed that all sub-modules address the WP2 findings assigned to them in Table 1 and that, taken together, they cover all eight training needs identified in D2.1. The check also led to a set of harmonisation requirements for the final versions. Module information sheets are completed in full for use on the e-learning platform, learning times are aligned with Table 2, and all author instructions and template guidance are removed from the sub-modules Sub-module titles are used consistently across the curriculum and the sub-modules, and illustrative or fictional case studies are clearly labelled as such. Where a tool has already been introduced in an earlier sub-module, later sub-modules refer back to it instead of repeating the explanation (Section 7.1).References to the WP2 needs analysis were updated to the Transnational Synthesis Report (D2.1, 2026), and a common layout, branding and EU funding disclaimer is applied throughout.

18.4 WP4 pilot validation

The second stage of validation takes place in WP4 (Competence Building and Pilot Training), in which the curriculum will be tested in all partner countries under the coordination of BCCI as pilot testing leader. The pilots will engage VET trainers, VET learners, rural entrepreneurs and agro-tourism businesses; the project foresees the involvement of 320 VET trainers in pilot testing and training.

During the pilots, participants will assess the usability, clarity, relevance and sector alignment of the sub-modules, while learners' results in the exercises and assessments will show whether the intended learning outcomes are achieved in practice. The feedback will be analysed at transnational level and used to refine the curriculum, resulting in the pilot-validated version that will then be translated into all partner languages and made available on the VETourismo e-learning platform.

19. Sustainability and Transferability of the Curriculum

The curriculum has been designed to remain in use after the end of the project. Its modular structure allows VET institutions and training centres to integrate individual sub-modules into their regular programmes without replacing existing courses, and the partner VET providers will incorporate the curriculum into their own training offer. Trainers who take part in the pilot training will continue to use the modules and methods with future groups of learners, ensuring that knowledge is transferred beyond the project period.

The curriculum, the video resources and the 360° virtual farm tours will remain freely accessible on the VETourismo e-learning platform and website after the project, which the partners will keep updated with new insights and good practices from the sector. Because the content is built on common European frameworks and on evidence from seven countries, it can also be transferred to other regions and VET systems: providers outside the partnership can adopt the complete pathway, select individual sub- modules or adapt the case studies to their local context.

Finally, the network of VET providers, chambers, agro-tourism businesses and local authorities involved in the project, together with the local multiplier events, will continue to promote the use of the curriculum and to advocate for the integration of digital and sustainable agro-tourism training into vocational education at local, national and European level.

20. Curriculum Overview at a Glance

Module	Main focus	Core contribution to the curriculum
1. Sustainable Agro-Tourism & Environmental Stewardship	Sustainable operations, biodiversity, soil, water, climate adaptation, certification	Builds the environmental foundation for responsible agro-tourism
2. Digitalisation & Smart Technologies in Agro-Tourism	Digital marketing, online visibility and smart technologies across the visitor journey	Develops digital capacity for promotion, operations and visitor engagement
3. Entrepreneurship & Business Development	Business models, finance, diversification, customer experience and direct bookings	Supports viable, customer-oriented agro-tourism businesses
4. Cultural Heritage & Community-Based Tourism	Local gastronomy, identity, community participation and shared routes	Connects agro-tourism with place, culture and rural communities

21. Sub-module Descriptions

1.1SustainableAgro-Tourism

uDevelop(DE) · Review:iAgroCert(EL) · 4h · Blended

Introduces sustainable agro-tourism as an operational system in which farming remains the primary activity. Learners work with five visitor segments, the six stages of the visitor journey, eco-friendly site management, climate adaptation and four circular economy loops. The practical core is a farm asset assessment and an eight-element framework for designing and pricing a visitor offer.

Case study: Fischbeck's Erlebnisbauernhof, Franconian Switzerland (Germany). Exercise: sustainability audit of an illustrative Bavarian dairy farm. Tools: myclimate.org and the EU Ecolabel self-assessment.

1.2 Environmental Stewardship

iAgroCert(EL) · Review:uDevelop(DE) · 6h · Blended

Focuses on protecting the natural capital of the farm. Learners carry out a biodiversity audit, apply visitor zoning and soil-health practices, complete a water audit, choose climate adaptation measures and follow the steps towards organic certification and EU quality schemes.

Case study: Eumelia Organic Agrotourism Farm, Laconia (Greece). Exercise: design of a Nature & Farm Trail. Tools: eAmbrosia and iNaturalist.

2.1 Digital Marketing for Agro-Tourism Operators

PORC(HR) · Review:DEULA(DE) · 7h · Blended

Builds online visibility with free tools. Learners set up a Google Business Profile, choose social media platforms according to their audience, create content with Canva, plan a content calendar, manage reviews, collect newsletter contacts in line with GDPR and read basic analytics.

Case study: Vinarija Dalj, Erdut wine region (Croatia). Exercise: 4-week social media content calendar. Tools: Google Business Profile, Meta Business Suite, Canva, Mailchimp, Google Analytics.

2.2 Smart Technologies for Agro-Tourism

DEULA(DE) · Review:PORC(HR) · 7h · Blended

Extends digital competence to the whole visitor journey. Learners analyse visitor needs before, during and after the visit, and apply QR-code learning trails, digital storytelling, virtual tours, feedback forms and demonstrations of smart farming technologies.

Case study: an illustrative family farm in Lower Saxony (Germany). Exercise: design a smart agro-tourism visitor experience. Tools: Google Business Profile, Google Forms, QR code generator, Canva, ThingLink.

3.1 Entrepreneurship

SlowTourism(IT) · Review:BCCI(BG) · 15h · Blended

Develops the business skills needed to turn a farm into a viable agro-tourism enterprise: the Business Model Canvas, simple business planning, fixed and variable costs, pricing, break-even, 12-month cash flow, revenue diversification against seasonality and access to EU rural development funding through LEADER.

Case study: an illustrative olive farm in Umbria (Italy). Exercise: Business Model Canvas and investor pitch. Assessment: Business Rescue Challenge.

3.2 Business Development & Customer Experience

BCCI(BG) · Review:SlowTourism(IT) · 9h · Blendedwithwork-basedlearning

Links business growth to customer experience. Learners compare online travel agency commissions with direct bookings, turn farm activities and food into storytelling-based experiences, and use simple website, survey and CRM tools to collect feedback and build loyalty.

Case study: an illustrative mountain eco-farm and guesthouse. Exercise: welcome role-play and visitor journey mapping. Tools: Google Business Profile, Webnode or Wix, Google Forms, Typeform, HubSpot CRM.

4.1 Local Identity & Gastronomy

LTTCălimănești(RO) · Review:CEPROF(PT) · 8h · Blendedwithwork-basedlearning

Shows how local food and traditions become agro-tourism products. Learners audit local identity resources, select anchor products, build a story, plan logistics and seasonal menus, price the experience and design a one-day “Taste of the Region” package.

Case study: Casa Daria Guesthouse, Călimănești (Romania). Exercise: practical local gastronomy challenge. Tools: Instagram, Google Business Profile, Google My Maps, QR recipe cards.

4.2 Community-Based Tourism

CEPROF(PT) · Review:LTTCălimănești(RO) · 6h · Blended

Places the business within its community. Learners apply the principles of community-based tourism, inventory cultural, natural and social assets, map and engage stakeholders, build partnerships and a shared narrative, and evaluate the impact on visitors and residents. European examples include Aldeias do Xisto, the Albergo Diffuso model, Spanish rural tourism cooperatives and Maramureș.

Case study: an illustrative community network in the Douro Valley (Portugal). Exercise: design a community agro-tourism route. Tool: Google My Maps.

22. Final Curriculum Integration

The VETourismo Curriculum brings the eight sub-modules together into one vocational learning pathway. It begins with the environment, because rural landscapes and agricultural resources are the foundation of agro-tourism. It then develops digital capacity, so that learners can communicate their offer and improve visitor engagement. The third module adds the business and customer dimension, turning resources and ideas into viable activities. The final module reconnects these activities with local identity and community, keeping agro-tourism rooted in the food, traditions, people and places that make rural experiences authentic.

The curriculum is evidence-based, structured, practice-oriented and peer-reviewed. Its modular design allows flexible use by VET providers, trainers, learners and rural entrepreneurs, while its shared architecture ensures consistency across all eight sub-modules. Following this WP2 development validation, the curriculum proceeds to pilot testing with its intended users in WP4 and to integration into the VETourismo e-learning platform in WP3.

Annexes

Annex	Content
A	Sub-module 1.1 – Sustainable Agro-Tourism (uDevelop)
B	Sub-module 1.2 – Environmental Stewardship (iAgroCert)
C	Sub-module 2.1 – Digital Marketing for Agro-Tourism Operators (PORC)
D	Sub-module 2.2 – Smart Technologies for Agro-Tourism (DEULA)
E	Sub-module 3.1 – Entrepreneurship (Slow Tourism)
F	Sub-module 3.2 – Business Development & Customer Experience (BCCI)
G	Sub-module 4.1 – Local Identity & Gastronomy (LTT)
H	Sub-module 4.2 – Community-Based Tourism (CEPROF)
I	Video resources

Annex A

Annex B

Annex C

Annex D

Annex E

Annex F

Annex G

Annex H

Annex I – Video Resources



VETourismo

MODULE 1.1

SUSTAINABLE AGRO-TOURISM

VETourismo

ADVANCING DIGITAL AND SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN AGRO-TOURISM FOR VETS

Project Number: 2025-1-DE02-KA220-VET-000361332

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1. INTRODUCTION

Rural agro-tourism is one of the most significant income diversification opportunities available to small family farms in Europe today. Across EU member states, farm holdings that combine agricultural production with structured visitor activities consistently generate higher net income per hectare than comparable farms that rely exclusively on commodity sales. According to the UNWTO Tourism in Rural Areas report (2022), rural tourism — of which agro-tourism is a growing component — accounts for approximately 20% of all EU tourism overnight stays, with demand driven by increasing urban interest in food provenance, authentic rural experiences, and sustainable travel choices. For small farms facing falling commodity prices, rising input costs, and structural pressure from larger industrial operations, agro-tourism represents one of the few income diversification routes that does not require significant new capital investment, because it is built on what the farm already produces and already knows.

Yet the majority of farms that could benefit from agro-tourism have not developed a formal offer. The reason is rarely a lack of assets. European rural landscapes contain farms with centuries of production history, distinctive local food products, traditional knowledge of land management and craft, and natural environments that urban visitors will travel hours to experience. The reason is a knowledge gap: the specific skills required to design a visitor offer, price it correctly, operate it sustainably, and communicate its value to potential visitors are not part of standard agricultural vocational training. This module is designed to close that gap.

Agro-tourism is defined as a form of rural tourism that takes place on working farms and is directly and visibly connected to agricultural production. Visitors do not come to a purpose-built leisure facility. They come to a real, functioning farm — to participate in harvest activities, observe food production processes, learn about soil management and animal husbandry, eat food grown on the premises, or experience the rhythms and realities of agricultural work. The authenticity of the agricultural operation is the core of the value proposition. A farm that has abandoned or cosmetically disguised its agricultural identity in order to become more visitor-friendly has also abandoned the primary reason visitors pay a premium for agro-tourism over conventional rural accommodation or leisure tourism.

This distinction matters in practice. An agro-tourism operator is not a hotel manager. They are a farmer who has chosen to share part of their agricultural operation with paying visitors at certain times and under controlled conditions. Every management decision about visitor numbers, scheduling, infrastructure, and pricing must be made in the context of the farm's primary agricultural function. Agro-tourism that disrupts harvests, exhausts the farm family, damages soil or water resources, or financially depends on visitor income to the exclusion of agricultural income is not sustainable — and it typically does not last.

Sustainability is therefore not an optional feature of agro-tourism. It is a structural requirement. Agro-tourism that is not sustainably designed and operated tends to degrade both the farm and the visitor experience over time. Soil compaction from unmanaged visitor foot traffic reduces crop yields. Water stress from poorly planned visitor facilities strains agricultural water budgets. Underpriced offers fail to cover real costs and generate financial pressure that leads to service quality decline and eventual closure. Operator burnout from unmanaged workloads causes health problems and forces operators to reduce or abandon farming — which removes the entire basis of the agro-tourism offer. These are not theoretical risks. They are documented causes of agro-tourism business failure across EU rural areas, identified in rural development research from the European Network for Rural Development (2020) and in national agro-tourism sector reviews across Germany, Italy, Greece, Portugal, and Croatia.

Sustainability in the context of this module means three things simultaneously. Environmental sustainability means managing the farm's natural resources — soil, water, biodiversity, air quality, and energy — in ways that maintain or improve their condition over time, so that the farm remains productive for future generations of operators and visitors. Social sustainability means that the visitor activity benefits the wider local community, not only the farm operator, and that it does not disrupt the farm family's own well-being or the relationships and routines of the surrounding community. Economic sustainability means that the agro-tourism offer generates enough revenue to cover its real costs, including the operator's time, and contributes positively to the farm's overall financial position — without creating a dependency on visitor income that would be dangerous if visitor numbers fell.

This module also introduces the circular economy as a practical operating principle for agro-tourism farms. The circular economy is an approach to resource management that aims to eliminate waste by keeping materials and products in productive use for as long as possible. In an agricultural context, this means identifying where value is currently leaving the farm system unnecessarily — surplus harvest that is discarded, organic kitchen waste that goes to landfill, packaging that is purchased once and thrown away — and designing interventions that close these loops. The circular economy is not presented here as an environmental philosophy. It is presented as a set of specific operational decisions that simultaneously reduce costs, generate additional revenue from existing resources, and create visible sustainability stories that visitors find compelling and memorable.

Climate adaptation is the fifth major theme running through this module. Climate change is already affecting the conditions under which European agro-tourism operates. Shifting harvest windows, longer drought periods, extreme summer heat, and more frequent severe weather events are disrupting the seasonal visitor programmes that many farms have built their agro-tourism offers around. Operators who plan their programmes around historical seasonal patterns without accounting for climate variability are making their businesses increasingly fragile. This module presents climate adaptation not as a long-term environmental concern but as an immediate operational and business planning requirement.

This module directly addresses three findings from the VETourismo WP2 Insights and Needs Analysis (D2.1), based on research carried out in all seven partner countries in 2026. The first finding is a limited operational understanding of sustainability among agro-tourism operators. Existing training in this area tends to present sustainability as a set of values or policy objectives — a commitment to the environment, a respect for local culture — rather than as a set of daily operational decisions with measurable outcomes. This module responds to that finding by translating each dimension of sustainability into specific, observable, and measurable farm practices, each with estimated costs, implementation steps, and expected outcomes.

The second finding is that VET programmes in agro-tourism are overly theoretical. Learners are taught the concepts and frameworks of rural tourism but are rarely required to apply them to a real farm context. This module responds by grounding every theoretical concept in a specific, realistic farm scenario and by including practical exercises that require learners to make the same decisions a real operator would face.

The third finding is low digital skills among rural agro-tourism operators. Many operators are unaware of the free digital tools available to them for measuring and communicating environmental performance, and those who are aware often lack the step-by-step guidance needed to use them effectively. Section 7 of this module introduces two such tools — the myclimate.org carbon footprint calculator and the EU Eco-label self-assessment — with detailed, farm-specific instructions.

By the end of this module, learners will be able to: define sustainable agro-tourism and distinguish it from conventional rural tourism with reference to its agricultural, environmental, social, and economic dimensions; identify the main visitor segments for European agro-tourism and select the most appropriate segment for a given farm context; design a complete, costed agro-tourism offer using the structured framework provided in Section 4; apply circular economy principles to a farm operation, identifying specific loops that reduce costs and generate visitor value; apply climate adaptation strategies to an agro-tourism programme, including seasonal diversification and operational adjustments; and use myclimate.org and the EU Eco-label self-assessment to calculate, interpret, and communicate the environmental performance of a visitor programme.

2. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this module, learners will be able to:

· Define sustainable agro-tourism and distinguish it from conventional rural tourism, with reference to the environmental, social, and economic dimensions of sustainability. [WP2 finding: Limited operational understanding of sustainability]

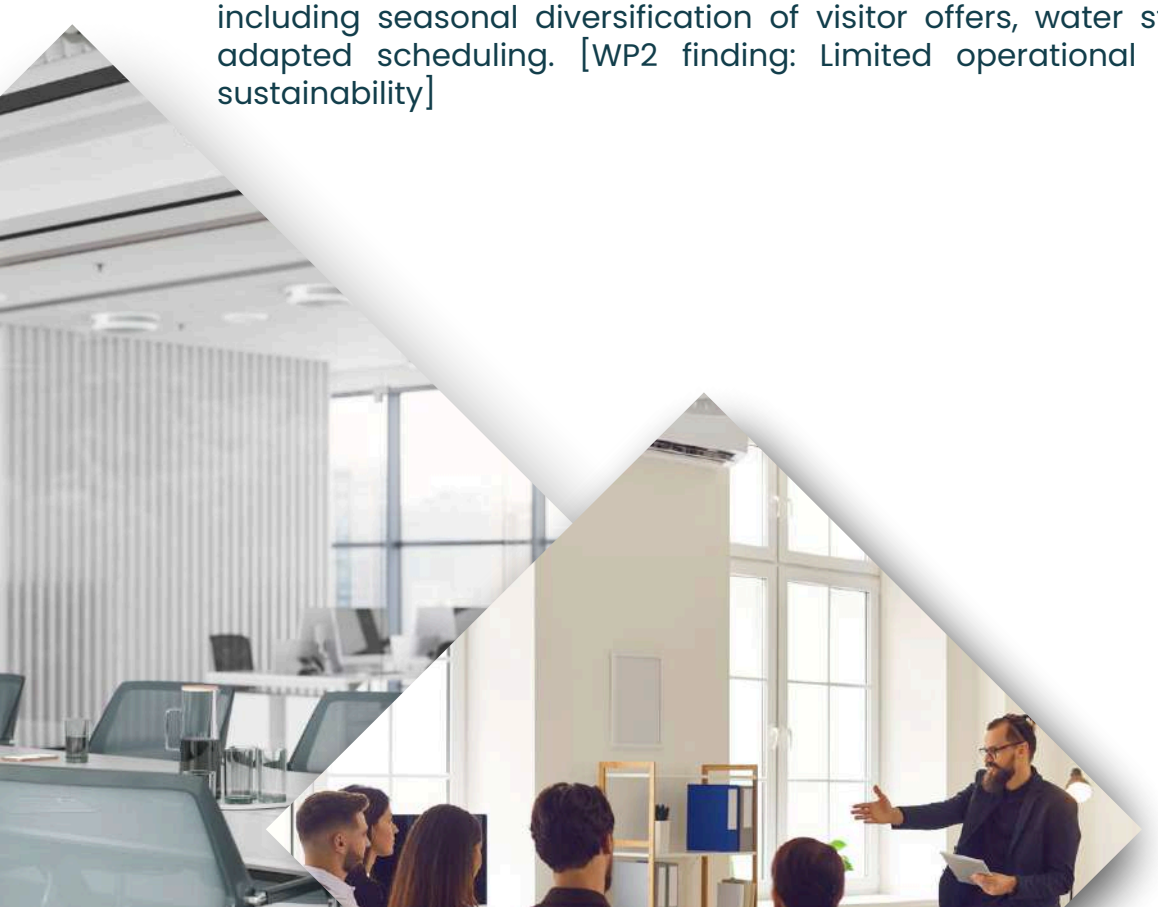
· Identify the five main visitor segments for European agro-tourism and select the most appropriate segment for a specific farm context. [WP2 finding: Overly theoretical VET programmes]

· Design a costed agro-tourism offer for a real or realistic farm, using the offer design framework provided in Section 4. [WP2 finding: Limited practical learning and work-based exposure]

· Apply the principles of the circular economy to a farm operation, identifying at least two existing or potential circular loops. [WP2 finding: Limited operational understanding of sustainability]

· Use myclimate.org and the EU Eco-label self-assessment tool to calculate and communicate the environmental performance of a visitor experience. [WP2 finding: Low digital skills among agro-tourism operators]

· Apply climate adaptation strategies to an agro-tourism programme, including seasonal diversification of visitor offers, water storage and heat-adapted scheduling. [WP2 finding: Limited operational understanding of sustainability]





3. PRACTICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Agro-Tourism: Definition and Scope

Agro-tourism (also written as agritourism) is defined as a form of rural tourism that takes place on working farms and is directly connected to agricultural production. Visitors do not come to a purpose-built attraction: they come to a real farm that continues to produce food, manage land, and operate as an agricultural business. The tourism activity is secondary to the agricultural activity, which must always remain the primary function of the land.

This definition has practical consequences. An agro-tourism business is not a theme park that happens to have animals. It is not a rural hotel that serves local food. It is a farm that has opened part of its operation, at certain times, to paying visitors who want to learn, participate, or experience something that cannot be found in a city. The authenticity of the farm is the product. If the farming stops, the agro-tourism offer loses its reason to exist.

The most common agro-tourism activity types, as documented across EU member states by Eurostat and UNWTO, include:

· Harvest and production experiences: visitors participate in olive picking, grape harvesting, hay-making, honey extraction, cheese-making, or bread baking under the guidance of the farmer.
· Farm stays: visitors sleep on or near the working farm, often in converted barns or renovated outbuildings, and participate in farm routines during their stay.
· Farm-to-table dining: meals prepared on site using produce from the farm or from local producers, with explanation of the food's origin and production method.
· Educational visits: structured visits for school classes, VET students, or adult learner groups, connected to curriculum topics such as food systems, ecology, biodiversity, or rural economics.
· Guided farm walks: walks through agricultural land with explanation of crops, animals, land management practices, wild plants, or seasonal activities.
· Farm shops and direct sales: visitors purchase farm products directly from the producer, with the opportunity to see where and how the product was made.

Policy context
The EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) recognise agro-tourism as a legitimate income diversification activity for farm holdings. Rural Development Programmes in all EU member states include measures that support agro-tourism investment, training, and marketing. Operators considering investment in visitor infrastructure should consult their national or regional Rural Development Programme managing authority for available co-financing options.

3.2 The Three Dimensions of Sustainability Definition

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. (Brundtland Commission, Our Common Future, 1987.) Applied to agro-tourism: the farm must remain agriculturally productive, financially viable, and environmentally intact after the visitors have left.

Sustainability in agro-tourism has three dimensions that must be considered together. Decisions that improve one dimension at the expense of another are not sustainable.

Environmental sustainability
Environmental sustainability means that the natural resources the farm depends on — soil, water, biodiversity, air quality, and energy — are maintained in good condition over time. Visitor activities create additional environmental pressures that must be managed.

Foot traffic on agricultural land compacts soil and damages root systems and soil microbial communities. This is managed by designating permanent visitor paths and avoiding routes through cropped areas. Visitor facilities (toilets, hand-washing stations, catering preparation areas) increase water consumption: dual-flush toilets, water stations using reusable bottles, and rainwater harvesting for irrigation reduce this impact significantly. Food served to visitors generates organic waste: composting systems convert this waste into a useful soil amendment that reduces fertiliser costs. Single-use plastic in visitor packaging contributes to environmental pollution: replacing plastic cups and bags with reusable alternatives or paper eliminates this waste stream entirely at low cost. Energy consumption in visitor areas is reduced by LED lighting (approximately 75% lower electricity use than incandescent), natural ventilation, and solar water heating.

Biodiversity on the farm is both an environmental responsibility and a direct visitor asset. Farms that maintain hedgerows, wildflower strips, and uncultivated field margins support local pollinator populations, reduce pest pressure, and create visible, photographable features that enhance the visitor experience. A two-metre wildflower strip along a farm boundary costs almost nothing to establish, requires no maintenance after the first year, and can become one of the most memorable elements of a farm walk.

Social sustainability

Social sustainability means that the agro-tourism activity benefits the broader local community, not only the farm operator. When a farm sources food, drinks, and supplies from neighbouring producers within a 30-kilometre radius, every euro spent by a visitor generates additional economic activity in the local area. Research on rural tourism value chains in Europe consistently shows a local multiplier effect of between 1.8 and 2.5 times the direct visitor spend when local sourcing is practised systematically.

Social sustainability also means managing the impact of visitors on the community. Excessive visitor numbers in a small rural area create noise, traffic, and disruption of daily routines for local residents. Setting a reasonable annual visitor capacity, scheduling arrival times away from peak agricultural working hours, and maintaining clear communication with neighbouring farms and households are practical social sustainability measures. For the farm family, social sustainability means managing their own workload: an agro-tourism business that requires seven days of work per week year-round will eventually cause the farmer to reduce or abandon farming, which undermines the entire offer.

Economic sustainability

Economic sustainability means generating sufficient income from agro-tourism to cover the real costs of the activity and contribute positively to the farm's overall financial health. Several specific principles apply:

· The agro-tourism income should supplement agricultural income, not replace it. A farm that depends entirely on visitor revenue and has abandoned agricultural production is no longer an agro-tourism business.

· Pricing must cover real costs. The most common financial error among new agro-tourism operators is pricing below cost. This happens because operators do not calculate their time as a cost, do not account for all materials, and do not include a margin for reinvestment or contingencies. The pricing framework in Section 4 addresses this systematically.

· Offers should be designed to be deliverable within the farm's existing labour capacity. An offer that requires the farmer to work an additional 30 hours per week to deliver is not economically sustainable even if the revenue looks attractive.

3.3 Visitor Segments in European Agro-Tourism

A visitor segment is a group of people who share similar motivations, expectations, and purchasing behaviours when choosing a rural tourism experience. Understanding which segment you are designing for is essential because different segments have different requirements, different price sensitivities, and different ways of finding and booking experiences. Attempting to design an offer that appeals to all segments simultaneously produces an offer that is distinctive to none of them.

Research across European rural tourism markets, including studies by Eurostat rural tourism surveys (2023), identifies five main visitor segments for agro-tourism:
Families with children (age 5-14)
This is the largest segment by volume in most European agro-tourism markets. Primary motivations: direct experience with farm animals; hands-on food production activities; outdoor physical activity; educational content that children can retell. Key requirements from the farm: child-safe environments with no unsupervised access to hazards; calm, manageable animals suitable for contact; toilet facilities; simple, structured participation activities; a small physical take-home item. Typical spend: moderate, price-sensitive; group often includes grandparents who have higher spend capacity.

Urban adult couples and individuals (25-50)
Second-largest segment by value in most markets. Primary motivations: authentic experience of rural life; disconnection from urban routine; quality local food; photography and social media content; the feeling of doing something with practical value. Key requirements: a working farm atmosphere that is not staged; high-quality, thoughtfully presented local food and drink; patient, knowledgeable hosting; natural light and photogenic spaces. Typical spend: higher than family segment; willing to pay a premium for quality and personalisation.

Food tourists and culinary travellers
A growing specialist segment with very high spend and strong word-of-mouth behaviour. Primary motivations: understanding food provenance; tasting products at their place of production; learning specific production techniques; purchasing distinctive local products to take home. Key requirements: tasting opportunities with explanation; visible production process (pressing, churning, fermenting, distilling); honest labelling distinguishing farm-produced from locally sourced from purchased; an opportunity to buy products on site. Typical spend: highest of all segments; often plan entire trips around food experiences.

Educational groups (school classes and VET students)
A structurally reliable segment because bookings are institutional and planned well in advance. Primary motivations (from the teacher/trainer perspective): connecting curriculum content to real-world experience; providing hands-on learning in agricultural, ecological, or food systems contexts. Key requirements from the farm: a prepared script or session plan matched to relevant curriculum content; sufficient physical space for groups of 15 to 30; advance booking process with written confirmation and invoice; liability insurance documentation if required by the school. Typical spend: lower per head but highly predictable and repeatable.

International and cultural tourists
Visitors who specifically seek rural and agricultural experiences as part of a wider cultural trip. Primary motivations: immersion in local agricultural traditions; tasting products unique to the region; discovery of authentic rural places not featured in mainstream tourism guides. Key requirements: basic information in English (or the visitor's language) available before arrival; a warm and personal welcome; something specific to the local culture, variety, tradition, or landscape that cannot be found elsewhere. Typical spend: moderate to high, depending on origin market.

3.4 The Visitor Journey

The visitor journey describes all the steps a visitor takes from first becoming aware of a farm's agro-tourism offer through to their post-visit behaviour. Understanding this journey helps operators identify where their offer is strong and where they are losing potential visitors.

The six stages of the agro-tourism visitor journey are:

· Discovery: the visitor encounters information about the farm for the first time. For most visitors today, this happens online — through a search engine, a regional tourism website, or a social media post. If a farm has no online presence, the majority of potential visitors will never discover it. (Digital visibility is covered in Module 2.1 of this curriculum.)

· Evaluation: the visitor assesses whether the offer is right for them by reviewing the description, photographs, pricing, reviews, and availability. At this stage, a clear, specific, and honest description of the offer is more effective than attractive photography alone.

· Booking: the visitor commits to a visit. The booking process must be simple and must generate a clear written confirmation. Even a WhatsApp message confirming the date, time, and price is sufficient for many operators to start.

· Arrival: the visitor arrives at the farm. First impressions form within the first five minutes. Clear directional signage, a tidy arrival area, and a personal welcome by the farmer or host set the tone for the entire experience.

· The experience: the visitor participates in the activity they booked. The experience must match the description exactly. Any element promised but not delivered undermines trust permanently.

· Post-visit: the visitor shares their experience through word of mouth, online reviews, and social media. This is the stage that generates new visitors for future sessions. Asking directly for a review, at the right moment, significantly increases the proportion of satisfied visitors who leave one.

3.5 Eco-Friendly Site Management

Eco-friendly site management in agro-tourism means operating visitor-facing activities in ways that minimise environmental impact, reduce operating costs, and provide visible sustainability practices that visitors can observe and understand. The following four areas are the highest priority for most small agro-tourism operations.

Energy management

Replace all visitor-area lighting with LED technology. LED bulbs consume approximately 75% less electricity than incandescent bulbs and have a service life 15 to 25 times longer. The financial payback period at standard EU rural electricity tariffs is typically 12 to 18 months. Operate visitor spaces using natural ventilation (open windows and doors on opposite sides of a building) before any mechanical cooling. Install occupancy timers or sensors on visitor toilet and corridor lighting so that lights switch off automatically when spaces are unoccupied.

Water management
Install a rainwater harvesting system using roof gutters connected to a storage barrel or tank. A 500-litre food-grade polyethylene barrel suitable for this purpose costs between 60 and 90 euros in most EU member states. Collected rainwater is suitable for garden irrigation, path washing, and toilet flushing (if systems permit). Install dual-flush mechanisms on all visitor toilets: these reduce flush volume from approximately 9 litres (full flush, standard cistern) to either 6 litres (full) or 3 litres (half), reducing toilet water use by 30 to 40%. Provide a water station with reusable glasses or offer visitors a refillable bottle at the start of their visit, eliminating the need for single-use plastic water bottles entirely.

Waste management
Establish a composting system for all organic kitchen waste generated by visitor food preparation and service. A three-bin cold composting system (three standard plastic compost bins in sequence, each processing organic material for one month before moving to the next) costs under 90 euros to establish and produces usable garden compost within 10 to 12 weeks. This eliminates organic material from the general waste stream entirely. Eliminate single-use plastic in all visitor-facing packaging. Use recycled paper bags, reusable glass jars, or cardboard for take-home products. Offer a deposit-and-return system for glass containers: charge a 1 to 2 euro deposit on each jar or bottle, refund it when the container is returned. This eliminates packaging waste and creates a practical incentive for repeat visits.

Biodiversity management
Establish a minimum 2-metre-wide wildflower or native meadow strip along at least one field margin or farm boundary. Seed with a native wildflower mix appropriate to your region, available from agricultural suppliers. In most EU climates, sowing in early autumn produces flowering plants from the following spring. After the first year, management requires only annual cutting in late autumn (after seeds have set). Benefits: increased pollinator populations on the farm, which benefit insect-pollinated crops; reduced pest pressure through increased predatory insect habitat; a visually attractive feature that visitors consistently describe as memorable. A small identification sign naming three or four of the flowering species adds educational value at negligible cost.

3.6 Climate Adaptation Strategies

Climate change is changing the conditions under which European agro-tourism operates. Temperature increases, shifting precipitation patterns, and more frequent extreme weather events are already affecting farm productivity and visitor behaviour across EU member states. Agro-tourism operators who do not plan for these changes will face increasing disruption to their visitor programmes.

The four main climate risks for European agro-tourism operations are:

· Drought and reduced water availability: particularly in southern and central Europe, where summer droughts are becoming longer and more intense, reducing the reliability of both agricultural production and visitor facilities that depend on consistent water supply.

· Extreme heat events: summer temperatures above 38-40 degrees Celsius make outdoor farm activities dangerous and uncomfortable, reducing the effective outdoor working season in Mediterranean regions.

· Flooding and storm events: more intense autumn and winter rainfall events damage rural infrastructure, disrupt harvests, and reduce the reliability of seasonal visitor programmes.

· Harvest date variability: warming temperatures and erratic precipitation are shifting the dates of key harvest events — olive harvest, grape harvest, hay-making, fruit picking — that agro-tourism experiences are built around. An experience advertised for a specific calendar window may not be deliverable in the same window every year.

Practical adaptation measures for small operators:

· Design experiences across two or three seasonal windows rather than concentrating all visitor income in one harvest period. A farm offering a spring herb walk, a summer cheese-making experience, and an autumn harvest provides income resilience across the year.

· Invest in water storage capacity (rainwater collection tanks) and water-efficient irrigation (drip systems) to maintain agricultural production and visitor facilities during drought periods.

· Schedule all outdoor visitor activities in the morning (before 11am) during summer months, and provide permanent shade structures for rest and refreshment areas.

· Communicate clearly with visitors that specific agricultural activities (such as harvests) are weather-dependent, and include a flexible rescheduling policy in all booking terms.

3.7 Circular Economy in Agro-Tourism

Definition

The circular economy is an economic system designed to eliminate waste and keep materials, products, and resources in use for as long as possible. In a circular economy, the output of one process becomes the input of another, creating closed loops rather than linear flows of extract-use-discard. (EU Circular Economy Action Plan, 2020.)

The circular economy has direct applications in agro-tourism because farms already operate within natural production cycles. The role of the agro-tourism operator is to identify where value is currently being lost from those cycles and design interventions that close the loops.

Four circular loops are commonly applicable and accessible to small agro-tourism farms:

The organic material loop

Kitchen and food preparation waste from visitor meals and catering is composted. The resulting compost is applied to the farm's kitchen garden or orchard. The kitchen garden and orchard produce food for future visitor meals. This loop eliminates organic waste from the general waste stream, reduces fertiliser purchase costs, reduces food purchase costs, and provides a direct, visible, and explainable sustainability story for visitors. Cost to establish: 60-90 euros for composting equipment. Payback period: typically less than one growing season.

The surplus harvest loop

Agricultural production generates surplus product every year: fruit that is overripe or cosmetically imperfect, excess herbs beyond what can be sold fresh, cheese that has not sold through normal channels before its optimal window. In a linear system, this surplus is discarded or composted without value extraction. In a circular system, it becomes a visitor take-home product: jam, dried herb bundles, herb salt, pickles, preserved oils. The surplus product that was going to be discarded at zero value becomes a retail product sold at a price that reflects the farmer's time and skill.

The reusable packaging loop
Most agro-tourism products are sold in single-use packaging (plastic bags, disposable cups, non-returnable glass). This generates waste and represents a recurring cost. A deposit-and-return system using standardised glass jars or bottles eliminates both. Charge a deposit of 1 to 2 euros on each container when sold; refund the deposit when the container is returned in good condition. The jar or bottle is washed and refilled. Cost per container over its lifetime drops to a small fraction of single-use cost. Visitor return visits (to reclaim the deposit) provide an additional booking or purchase opportunity.

The animal manure loop
Farms with livestock generate manure as a by-product of animal husbandry. Managed correctly (stored and composted rather than spread raw), this manure becomes a high-value soil amendment that replaces or supplements purchased synthetic fertilisers. Combining animal manure with organic kitchen waste from visitor catering in a single composting system closes both loops simultaneously and produces a higher-quality compost than either input alone.

4. PRACTICAL APPLICATION

4.1 Farm Asset Assessment

Before designing any visitor offer, the operator must conduct a systematic assessment of what the farm already has. This step prevents the most common mistake in agro-tourism development: designing an offer that the farm cannot deliver with its existing resources.

Work through the following six questions. Write your answers in full sentences, not single words. The quality of your offer design in step 4.2 will depend directly on the quality of your answers here.

· Agricultural activities: What happens on this farm across the calendar year? List every activity by month or season, including activities that you consider routine (milking, pruning, harvesting, feeding, making). These are your raw material.

· Products: What does the farm produce? Include primary products (wine, oil, cheese, meat, vegetables) and by-products or surplus (whey, prunings, overripe fruit, unsold stock).

· Spaces: What physical spaces exist that could accommodate visitors? Assess each space for capacity (how many people), shelter (covered or open), facilities (toilet access, seating, water), and safety (distance from machinery, chemicals, traffic areas).

· Knowledge and skills: What expertise does the farm operator hold? Include formal qualifications, traditional knowledge, language skills, and any specific expertise in food production, land management, or rural ecology.

· Location and landscape: What is distinctive about the farm's location? Consider the landscape, proximity to natural features, altitude, local biodiversity, and any cultural or historical significance of the site.

· Capacity: How many hours per week, and which weeks per year, are genuinely available for visitor activities without compromising the farming operation? Be realistic. A common error is to plan agro-tourism around the farm's busiest agricultural periods.

4.2 Offer Design Framework

A complete agro-tourism offer consists of eight elements. Every element must be defined before the offer is made available to visitors. An offer with undefined elements will disappoint visitors and create financial or operational problems for the operator.

Element 1: Experience name
The name communicates the offer's content, location, and value to a potential visitor before they read any further description. An effective name is specific, honest, and evocative. Compare:
· Weak: 'Farm tour' — communicates almost nothing; could describe anything from a 10-minute walk to a full-day programme.
· Effective: 'Olive Harvest Morning at Masseria Saraceno, Puglia — pick, press, and take home your own cold-pressed olive oil' — communicates the activity (picking and pressing), the location (a specific named farm in a recognisable region), the duration (morning), and the take-home outcome.

Element 2: Duration and schedule
State the start time, the approximate end time, and the sequence of main activities. Visitors need this information to plan their day. Consider the following when setting the schedule: outdoor activities should be completed before 11am in summer to avoid heat; animal-related activities work best when aligned with natural feeding times; food tasting sessions require preparation time that must be factored into the schedule.

Element 3: Activity description
Describe in specific, sensory terms what the visitor will physically do. Avoid abstract descriptions. 'Participants will join Margit for a guided walk through the farm's herb meadows above Vorra, identifying eight species of wild herbs, harvesting small quantities of three, and using a hand-operated stone grinder to prepare their own herb salt blend' is a complete activity description. 'Herb experience' is not.

Element 4: Learning outcomes
Every agro-tourism experience should result in the visitor leaving with knowledge or understanding they did not have before. State this explicitly in the offer description. Examples: 'You will learn the traditional methods of making Pecorino Romano from raw sheep's milk'; 'You will understand how soil health affects wine flavour'; 'You will be able to identify the five most common medicinal herbs in the Bavarian Alps by sight and smell'.

Element 5: Take-home item
The take-home item extends the visitor's connection to the farm beyond the day of the visit. It should be something produced or closely connected to the farm's own production. It does not need to be expensive. Examples: a 100g jar of herb salt prepared during the visit; a printed recipe card using the farm's olive oil; a 200ml bottle of cold-pressed juice from the farm's orchard; a small bundle of dried lavender from the farm's fields tied with natural twine. The item should carry the farm's name and, if possible, the production date.

Element 6: Group size

Group size determines the intimacy of the experience, the logistics of delivery, and the revenue per session. Recommended starting sizes by experience type:

· Guided farm walks and nature-based experiences: 4 to 8 adults. Allows the guide to maintain conversation with every participant; manageable in most farm landscapes.

· Food production experiences (cheese-making, oil pressing, bread baking): 4 to 10 participants. Determined primarily by the capacity of the production equipment.

· Educational visits (school groups): 15 to 25 students plus accompanying adults. Requires designated group circulation routes and breakout spaces.

· Farm-to-table dining: 8 to 16 guests. Determined by kitchen and dining space capacity.

Element 7: Price per person

Price is calculated from costs, not from guesswork or by copying competitors. Use the following formula for each session:

Total session cost = (Preparation hours x hourly rate) + (Materials cost per session) + (Delivery hours x hourly rate) + (Any fixed costs attributable to this session)

Price per person = (Total session cost / Number of participants) x (1 + target margin percentage)

Recommended minimum margin: 25% above cost. This covers contingencies, reinvestment in the offer, and periods when participant numbers are below maximum.

Element 8: Sustainability element

Every offer must include at least one sustainability element that is visible to visitors, can be explained in plain language, and is genuinely practised on the farm. This is not a marketing claim. It is a feature of the experience that differentiates agro-tourism from conventional leisure tourism. Examples:

· 'All herbs are harvested using a cut-and-come-again method that leaves the plant to continue growing and flowering, supporting the farm's pollinator population.'

· 'The jar for your herb salt is glass and returnable: bring it back on your next visit and receive a replacement jar of our seasonal preserve.'

· 'The wood for our bread oven comes from our own orchard prunings, which would otherwise be chipped and composted.'

· 'We monitor the CO2 footprint of each session using myclimate.org. The average footprint per visitor for today's session, including travel from Munich, is 4.8 kg CO2 equivalent.'

4.3 Farm Visitor Readiness Checklist

Before opening to paying visitors, conduct a full visitor readiness assessment. All items below must be in place. Items marked with an asterisk are legal requirements in most EU member states; local regulations should be verified.

· * Safety inspection: all visitor routes have been walked and assessed for hazards (uneven ground, trip risks, open water, low branches); all hazards have been addressed or clearly marked.

· * Machinery and chemical storage: all farm machinery is stored securely and out of reach of visitors during visiting hours; all agrochemicals and veterinary medicines are locked and out of visitor areas.

· * Animal management: any animals that visitors will encounter have been assessed for predictable behaviour around strangers; a containment plan exists for any animal that becomes agitated during a visit.

· * Sanitation: at least one clean, accessible toilet with running water and hand soap is available for visitor use. For outdoor activities, this includes signposted access to a nearby facility.

· Wayfinding: clear signs guide visitors from the designated parking or arrival point to the activity area and back to the exit, without requiring them to pass through active working areas of the farm.

· First aid: a stocked first aid kit is present in the farm buildings; the farm operator knows the address and emergency contact number of the nearest medical facility.

· Insurance: the operator has confirmed with their farm insurance provider that commercial visitor activities are covered, or has obtained additional liability coverage if required.

· Booking record: a simple written or digital record is maintained of all confirmed bookings, including contact details for each group. This record is essential in the event of an incident.

4.4 Daily Sustainable Operations

Sustainable daily operations means running visitor activities in ways that minimise environmental impact and maximise the authenticity of the experience. The following checklist is organised by category and designed to be reviewed at the start of each visitor season.

Energy

· All visitor-area lighting uses LED bulbs (maximum 10W equivalent per fitting for standard spaces).

· Outdoor visitor areas use solar-powered path lighting where grid connection is impractical.

· Heating and cooling in visitor spaces is managed using natural ventilation as the first option; mechanical systems only when temperatures fall outside the 16-26C comfort range.

· All appliances and lighting in visitor areas are switched off or placed on standby at the end of each session.

Water

· A rainwater collection system is installed and functioning (minimum 500-litre capacity).
· Visitor toilet facilities use dual-flush or low-flow mechanisms.
· Drinking water is provided via a water station with reusable glasses; no single-use plastic water bottles are purchased for visitor use.
· Irrigation of kitchen gardens and visitor-facing planted areas uses only rainwater or recycled process water where available.

Waste

· A three-bin composting system is operational for organic kitchen and farm waste.
· All visitor take-home products use glass, paper, or reusable containers; no single-use plastic packaging.
· A deposit-and-return system is in operation for all glass containers sold with visitor products.
· All non-organic waste generated by visitor activities is separated into recyclable streams before disposal.

Local sourcing and food

· At least 70% of food and drink served to visitors originates from the farm itself or from producers within 30 km.
· The origin of all food and drink served to visitors can be stated specifically and accurately (farm name, location, production method).

Any external supplier used for visitor catering has been personally visited by the operator and their practices reviewed.

Offer design template — use this to draft your first agro-tourism offer:

Experience name: _____

Duration and schedule: _____

What visitors will do: _____

What visitors will learn: _____

What they take home: _____

Maximum group size: _____

Cost per session (show calculation): _____

Price per person (show calculation): _____

Sustainability element: _____

You should assess the offer against the following three questions:

- Is the activity description specific enough that a visitor could picture exactly what they would be doing?
- Is the price justified by the cost calculation shown?
- Is the sustainability element real, visible, and explainable to a visitor in two sentences?

5. CASE STUDY

Fischbeck's Erlebnisbauernhof (Fischbeck's Adventure Farm)
Vorra an der Pegnitz, Franconian Switzerland, Bavaria, Germany

Context
Fischbeck's Erlebnisbauernhof is a working organic farm located at Hauptstrasse 27, 91247 Vorra an der Pegnitz, in the Franconian Switzerland nature park (Naturpark Frankische Schweiz), approximately 32 km northeast of Nuremberg. The farm has been owned continuously by the Leimberger family since 1702 — a period spanning more than three centuries. Its history reflects the trajectory of European agriculture across this period: the farm began as a fishing operation on the Pegnitz river (the name Fischbeck means 'fish stream'), moved to hop cultivation serving the Bavarian brewing industry, operated as a country inn (Gastwirtschaft) from around 1900, and eventually became a conventional dairy farm as the twentieth century progressed.

Challenge
By the late 1990s, the Leimberger family faced a situation shared by thousands of small dairy farms across Germany and the wider EU. Processor prices paid for raw milk had been falling steadily for over a decade, driven by consolidation in the dairy processing sector and increasing competition from large-scale operations. The capital investment required to expand the herd to a size that would be economically viable under the new price structure was beyond the farm's means, and the family had no wish to take on the associated debt. Conventional dairy farming at their existing scale was generating declining margins each year.

The farm's assets were clear: 300 years of continuous family ownership, a historic stone farmhouse and traditional Franconian outbuildings, extensive permanent pastures within the Naturpark Frankische Schweiz, a diverse meadow flora that had developed without artificial fertilisers over many years, and Margit Leimberger's deep knowledge of traditional farming practices and rural ecology. The challenge was how to build a financially sustainable future from these assets without abandoning the farm's agricultural identity.

Action

In 2003 the Leimberger family took two decisions simultaneously. The first was to convert the entire farm operation to certified organic farming under the Bioland standard. Bioland is one of Germany's two main organic farming certification bodies (the other being Demeter) and operates to criteria that are stricter than EU organic baseline regulations. Bioland certification requires: full conversion of all arable and pasture land; elimination of all synthetic pesticides, herbicides, and mineral fertilisers; compliance with specific animal welfare standards (outdoor access, species-appropriate feed ratios, maximum stocking densities); minimum 20% of land maintained as ecological compensation areas (field margins, hedgerows, wildflower strips); and annual third-party inspection. The conversion to Bioland was not primarily a marketing decision. It was a fundamental change to the farm's entire system of management.

The second decision was for Margit Leimberger to undertake professional training as a certified herb educator (Krauterpedagogin) through the Gundermannschule, a vocational training institution based in Franconian Switzerland that specialises in experiential education in natural and agricultural settings. The qualification involves approximately 200 hours of training covering wild plant identification, ecological relationships in agricultural landscapes, and methods for facilitating learning experiences with groups of different ages. This qualification gave Margit both the formal credentials and the pedagogical skills to deliver structured educational experiences to school groups, adult learners, and family visitors.

The combination of Bioland organic certification and the herb educator qualification created the foundations for the farm's current agro-tourism offer, which includes:

· Guided herb walks: group walks through the farm's Bioland-certified meadows above the Pegnitz Valley, identifying and explaining wild herb species, their ecological roles, their traditional culinary and medicinal uses, and the farming practices that maintain the meadow's botanical diversity. Duration approximately 2.5 hours. Available for school groups, family groups, and adult learner groups.

· Organic farm tours: structured educational visits covering the farm's Bioland beef cattle, permanent pasture management, grain and potato production, and the practical differences between organic and conventional farming systems. Duration approximately 2 hours. Designed for school groups from primary through to vocational level.

· Animal experience and petting area: supervised interaction with the farm's donkeys, pigs, chickens, rabbits, and goats. Available as part of school visit programmes and family day visits.

· Donkey walks: guided walks through the Pegnitz Valley countryside accompanied by the farm's donkeys Seppel and Frieda. Duration approximately 1.5 hours. Available for families and small groups.

· Hay hotel (Heuhotel): overnight accommodation in a purpose-prepared area of fresh hay in one of the farm's traditional Franconian barns. This format is specific to the Bavarian and Franconian rural tourism tradition and directly showcases the farm's own hay production.

· Curriculum-linked school programmes: structured learning sessions designed around specific curriculum topics for different age groups, including 'Die Hecke als Supermarkt' (The Hedgerow as a Supermarket — biodiversity and wild food plants, primary level), 'Rund um die Kartoffel' (All About the Potato — food systems and crop science, primary to lower secondary), and 'Biodiversitat' (Biodiversity — ecological relationships in agricultural landscapes, lower to upper secondary).

Result

Fischbeck's Erlebnisbauernhof is listed as a recommended agro-tourism destination by the Naturpark Frankische Schweiz visitor authority, the Nuremberg Metropolitan Region tourism portal (urlaub.nuernberger-land.de), and DB Regio Bayern, which selected it as one of Bavaria's featured adventure farms accessible by regional rail from Nuremberg Central Station. The farm receives school groups from throughout the Nuremberg metropolitan area (population approximately 1.3 million), family day visitors from across Franconia, adult educational groups from VET institutions and corporate team-building programmes, and increasing numbers of international tourists visiting rural Franconia.

Margit Leimberger also delivers outreach visits to schools in the Nuremberg urban area — travelling to classrooms with materials from the farm when groups cannot make the journey to Vorra. This extends the farm's educational reach and provides a low-cost introduction that often results in a subsequent full farm visit booking.

The farm's sustainability is operational and verifiable, not claimed. Bioland certification requires annual independent inspection. All animal feed originates from the farm's own land or from certified organic sources. Animal manure is composted and returned to the meadows as soil amendment, closing the nutrient loop. The meadows managed without synthetic inputs provide the botanical diversity that makes the herb walk both educationally possible and commercially distinctive. The circular relationship between farming practice and visitor offer is demonstrable and visible: the cattle managed on the farm tour produce the manure that maintains the meadow fertility that sustains the wild herb diversity that forms the content of the herb walk that generates visitor income that supports the cattle. Visitors leave with a direct, physical experience of how an integrated agricultural system works.

Lessons for learners

· Economic transformation through professional development: the conversion from unviable conventional dairy to successful organic agro-tourism was enabled primarily by Margit Leimberger's second professional qualification. The certification as herb educator cost significantly less than any infrastructure investment and produced the core content of the farm's most distinctive offer. This principle is scalable: identifying the specific professional development that would unlock a farm's existing assets for visitor use is a high-return investment.

· Agricultural identity as the product: every visitor experience at Fischbeck's is directly connected to and explicable by the farming operation. The herb walk is possible because the meadows are managed organically. The farm tour makes sense because the Bioland system gives it specific content. The hay hotel showcases the farm's actual hay production. There is no separation between the farming and the tourism. This integration is what distinguishes authentic agro-tourism from rural leisure tourism and is what justifies the premium price.

Circular economy as a visitor asset: the farm's organic nutrient loop (manure to compost to meadow fertility to wild herbs to herb walk to visitor income to farm maintenance) is not described in abstractions to visitors. It is shown. Visitors· walk through meadows whose diversity is the direct result of management decisions they can observe and understand. This creates a specific, memorable educational experience that cannot be replicated in any non-farming context.

· Educational programmes as a stable revenue stream: curriculum-linked school programmes provide advance bookings, institutional invoicing, and repeatable visits that are substantially less dependent on good weather than informal visitor experiences. For farms with the capacity to develop educational content, school programmes provide revenue stability across periods when leisure visitor numbers are lower.

Reflection questions:

· Identify two specific decisions made by the Leimberger family that were essential to the farm's successful transition to agro-tourism. For each decision, explain what would have happened if it had not been taken.

· The case study describes several circular loops operating on the farm. Map the organic material loop through its full cycle, starting from animal feed and ending with visitor income. How many steps are in the loop, and at which step is value most clearly created for the visitor?

Fischbeck's curriculum-linked school programme 'Die Hecke als Supermarkt' uses the farm's Bioland hedgerows as a teaching resource. Design one activity from that programme suitable for a group of 20 ten-year-old students, lasting 30 minutes and requiring no equipment beyond what the hedgerow itself provides.

6. INTERACTIVE EXERCISE

Sustainability Audit of Hof Weber, Allgau, Bavaria
Learning goal
Learners will conduct a structured sustainability audit of a realistic small farm profile, identify and prioritise improvement measures, estimate environmental and financial impacts, and present findings to another learner for peer review.

Farm profile: Hof Weber
The following farm profile is a fictional composite representative of documented small dairy farms in the Allgau region of Bavaria. All data is based on published regional agricultural statistics and surveys. No correspondence to any specific real farm is intended.

Hof Weber is a mixed-grass dairy operation near Gorisried, Ostallgau district, Bavaria. Farm size: 18.4 hectares of permanent pasture and managed meadow. Livestock: 50 Brown Swiss dairy cows plus young stock. Primary product: raw milk sold to a regional dairy cooperative at the prevailing market price. Secondary products: none currently marketed.

Physical resources: stone farmhouse (built approximately 1890), renovated and occupied by the family; stone barn (capacity approximately 60 cattle, currently housing 50 cows and young stock); a second smaller barn used for equipment storage; an apple and pear orchard of 0.8 hectares (mixed heritage varieties planted 1960-1975); a south-facing terrace attached to the farmhouse overlooking the pastures; a small kitchen garden of approximately 80 square metres currently growing vegetables for household use.

Current environmental practices: no organic certification; all energy from the regional grid (Bavaria's grid mix 2023: approximately 48% renewable); no renewable energy installations on the farm; kitchen and food waste deposited in the general municipal waste stream; no composting system; visitor sanitation: single toilet in the farmhouse (standard cistern); drinking water for any visitors served using bottled mineral water purchased from the local supermarket; catering purchases: all food purchased from Rewe supermarket in Kaufbeuren, 14 km away; orchard harvest: approximately 40% of annual apple and pear production was sold to a juice producer in 2023; approximately 60% (estimated 800 kg) was left unharvested due to low prices and logistics costs; manure management: stored in concrete lagoon, spread on fields in spring and autumn.

Visitor activities to date: Klaus Weber (48) has hosted approximately 15 to 20 informal family visits per year for the past three years, mainly from Munich-area families who contact him through word of mouth. Duration approximately 2 to 3 hours. No set programme; Klaus shows visitors the animals, walks the fields, and answers questions. No charge. Klaus's daughter Sophie (20) studies rural tourism management at the vocational college in Kempten and has suggested developing a formal agro-tourism offer. Sophie is available on weekends during term time and full-time over summer.

Distance and accessibility: the farm is located 7.8 km from the nearest village with a bus service to Kaufbeuren and Kempten. The nearest railway station is Kaufbeuren (InterCity and regional services), 22 km by road. Public transport from Munich takes approximately 2 hours 15 minutes (train to Kaufbeuren plus taxi or local bus).

Task instructions

Complete all four steps individually or in pairs. Total time: 60 minutes.

Step 1: Score the sustainability audit (20 minutes)

Using the eight-item sustainability self-assessment checklist from Section 8, evaluate Hof Weber on each item. Use only the information provided in the farm profile above. Score each item:

· 0 = the practice is not in place at all based on the profile information
· 1 = the practice is partially in place or there is evidence it could be implemented with minimal change
· 2 = the practice is fully in place as described in the checklist

Record your score for each item and calculate the total. Be ready to justify each score with a specific reference to the farm profile.

Step 2: Identify three priority improvements (15 minutes)

From the items you scored 0, select the three that you consider most important for Hof Weber to address first. For each of your three priorities, write:

· (a) A specific description of the improvement measure and how it would be implemented on this farm.
· (b) An estimated cost or resource requirement for implementation, based on realistic market prices.
· (c) The expected environmental benefit, stated as specifically as possible (e.g. 'elimination of approximately 400 single-use plastic bottles per year' rather than 'reduced plastic use').
· (d) The expected business benefit, stated as specifically as possible (e.g. 'saving of approximately 340 EUR per year on bottled water purchases, based on current visitor numbers' rather than 'cost reduction').

Step 3: Calculate the carbon footprint of one visit (15 minutes)
Using the myclimate.org calculator, calculate the approximate CO2 equivalent footprint of a single agro-tourism visit at Hof Weber for the following scenario:
· Group: 6 adult visitors from Munich city centre, arriving by private petrol car.
· Transport: 100 km each way (Munich to Gorisried). Return journey included.
· On-farm energy use: 3 hours duration; indoor catering preparation (30 minutes in kitchen); outdoor farm walk (2 hours 30 minutes).
Use the myclimate.org 'Travel' calculator for the transport element. Use the 'Events' calculator for the on-farm element. Record:
· CO2 equivalent from transport: ___ kg per visitor
· CO2 equivalent from on-farm activities: ___ kg per visitor
· Total CO2 equivalent per visitor: ___ kg
· Which element is the largest contributor?
· What single change to the visit design would have the greatest impact on reducing the per-visitor footprint?

Step 4: Present and discuss (10 minutes)
Share your audit scores, three priority improvements, and carbon footprint calculation with another learner or the group. Address the following discussion questions:
· Did you and your partner score the same items as 0? If you scored the same item differently, discuss the evidence from the farm profile that each of you used.
· Did you select the same three priorities? If not, what criteria did each of you use to rank priorities?
· Sophie is proposing Bioland certification for Hof Weber. Would achieving Bioland certification automatically satisfy any of the items in the sustainability checklist? Which ones, and which additional steps would the certification process require beyond what is in the checklist?

Expected output
Each learner or pair produces: (1) a completed eight-item audit scorecard with total score and one-sentence justification for each score; (2) written descriptions of three priority improvements, each including a specific implementation description, estimated cost, estimated environmental benefit (quantified), and estimated business benefit (quantified); (3) a completed carbon footprint calculation with the three figures above and a one-sentence reduction recommendation.

Review criteria
Reviewer assesses: Are the audit scores justified by specific evidence from the farm profile, or are they based on assumptions? Are the environmental and business benefits stated quantitatively, or only in general terms? Is the carbon footprint calculation plausible (does the transport figure seem reasonable for a 200 km return car journey for 6 passengers)?

7. DIGITAL TOOL

Tool 1: myclimate.org — Carbon Footprint Calculator
myclimate.org is operated by the myclimate Foundation, a Swiss non-profit organisation established in 2002. It provides a publicly accessible suite of free online calculators for estimating the carbon footprint of travel, corporate operations, events, products, and buildings. The calculators are available in German, English, French, and Italian and are designed for use by individuals and organisations without specialist environmental science training. The Foundation is a recognised project developer under the Gold Standard and Verified Carbon Standard certification frameworks.

Why this tool is relevant to agro-tourism operators: visitors to agro-tourism farms increasingly ask about the environmental credentials of the experiences they choose. Being able to state the carbon footprint of a visit — with a specific number, calculated using a recognised methodology — is a differentiating factor in marketing and a demonstration of the operational transparency that distinguishes authentic agro-tourism from greenwashed rural tourism.

The calculator also functions as an internal management tool: by identifying which element of a visit generates the most CO2 (typically visitor transport, which usually exceeds all other elements combined), operators can design experiences that reduce the per-visitor footprint — for example, by encouraging rail travel by positioning pick-up points at train stations, or by offering multi-activity day programmes that justify longer visits and reduce the per-hour travel footprint.

How to use myclimate.org for an agro-tourism session
Step 1: Open myclimate.org in a web browser. Navigate to the 'Calculate' section in the main navigation. You will see several calculator categories listed.

Step 2: For visitor transport, select 'Car' or 'Public Transport' under the Travel/Mobility category. Enter: number of passengers; distance (one way, in km); vehicle type (petrol, diesel, electric, hybrid). The calculator returns total CO2 equivalent for the journey in kg. Divide by number of passengers to obtain CO2 per visitor.

Step 3: For on-farm energy use, select 'Events' under the Events category. Enter: number of participants; event duration in hours; venue type (indoor, outdoor, or mixed); catering type (no catering, basic refreshments, or full meal service). The calculator returns an estimated CO2 equivalent for the on-farm portion of the visit.

Step 4: Add the transport figure and the on-farm figure to obtain total CO2 equivalent per visitor per visit. Record this figure.

Step 5: Calculate the total annual footprint for your agro-tourism offer by multiplying the per-visit figure by the expected number of visitors per year. This provides context for communicating your farm's total agro-tourism carbon impact.

Step 6: Use the figure in two ways: (a) internally, to identify the highest-impact element and design a reduction measure; (b) externally, to communicate your farm's environmental performance in marketing materials, on your website, or on a welcome card given to visitors at the start of their visit.

Limitation: myclimate.org uses average emissions factors for transport modes and energy sources in each country. These factors are updated periodically but may not reflect your specific vehicle's efficiency or your regional energy grid's renewable percentage. The calculated figure should be treated as an estimate accurate to approximately 15-20%, which is sufficient for communication and management purposes but not for formal carbon reporting.

Tool 2: EU Eco-label Self-Assessment — ecolabel.eu

The EU Eco-label, officially named the EU Flower, is a voluntary environmental certification scheme administered by the European Commission under Regulation (EC) No 66/2010. It is one of the most widely recognised environmental labels in Europe and applies to a range of product and service categories. The Tourism Accommodation product group was established under Commission Decision 2017/175/EU and covers hotels, bed and breakfasts, holiday homes, campsites, and visitor-facing rural accommodation facilities.

The EU Eco-label self-assessment tool allows any operator to evaluate their current practice against the full set of certification criteria before deciding whether to apply for formal certification. Even for operators who do not intend to apply, completing the self-assessment annually provides a systematic review of environmental performance across energy, water, waste, chemical use, noise, biodiversity, and visitor communication.

How to use the EU Eco-label self-assessment

Step 1: Go to ecolabel.eu. In the Products and Services section, find Tourism Accommodation. Download the current version of the criteria document (the document is updated periodically; check the publication date to ensure you have the current version).

Step 2: Read through the criteria document in full before beginning the assessment. The document distinguishes between mandatory criteria (all of which must be met for certification) and optional criteria (which are scored on a points basis; a minimum points threshold must be reached in addition to all mandatory criteria).

Step 3: For each mandatory criterion, assess whether your facility currently meets it (yes/no/partial). Mandatory criteria cover: metered energy consumption for heating and electricity; minimum percentage of energy from renewable sources; low-flow water fittings; specific waste separation and composting requirements; restrictions on certain chemical categories in cleaning products; and information provided to guests about the facility's environmental performance.

Step 4: For the optional criteria, score each item you currently implement or could implement within the next 12 months. Optional criteria include specific energy efficiency measures (heat pumps, solar water heating, LED lighting throughout), water recycling systems, organic or locally sourced food, biodiversity measures (wildflower areas, bird boxes, bat boxes), electric vehicle charging, and guest behaviour communication programmes.

Step 5: Calculate your current mandatory compliance rate and your current optional points score. Identify: (a) mandatory criteria you do not currently meet — these are your minimum compliance pathway if you wish to pursue certification; (b) optional criteria where you can increase your points score most cost-effectively.

Step 6: Use the results to plan a 12-month improvement programme with specific targets. Review the self-assessment at the same time each year.

Fees for EU Ecolabel certification are charged by the national competent body within the limits set in Regulation (EC) No 66/2010, as amended by Regulation (EU) No 782/2013. There is a one-off application fee, capped at 600 EUR for SMEs and 350 EUR for micro-enterprises, and an annual fee, reduced by at least 25% for SMEs and micro-enterprises. The application fee is reduced by 30% for EMAS-registered applicants or 15% for ISO 14001-certified applicants. Note that the Tourism Accommodation criteria apply to farms offering overnight stays; day-visit activities alone cannot receive the label, but the criteria remain a useful self-assessment checklist.

8. SUSTAINABILITY LINK

This section makes explicit the connections between the practices covered in this module and the environmental, social, economic, and circular economy dimensions of sustainability. It also provides the self-assessment checklist used in the Interactive Exercise.

Environmental outcomes

· Organic material composting: eliminates organic waste from the general waste stream; produces a soil amendment that reduces or eliminates synthetic fertiliser use; reduces methane emissions associated with organic material in landfill or open waste storage. Estimated impact for a farm serving 500 visitors per year: approximately 180-240 kg of organic waste diverted from landfill annually.

· Rainwater harvesting: reduces dependency on treated mains water for agricultural and garden irrigation; maintains water availability during drought periods; reduces operating costs. Estimated impact: each millimetre of rain falling on one square metre of roof yields about one litre of water. A 50 m2 barn roof in a region with 600 mm of annual rainfall can therefore collect roughly 24,000 litres per year (allowing about 20% for losses), enough to refill a 500-litre barrel many times over during the season.

· LED lighting conversion: reduces electricity consumption in visitor areas by approximately 75% compared to incandescent alternatives; reduces heat generation in enclosed visitor spaces, reducing cooling demand. Payback period: typically 12-18 months at standard EU rural electricity tariffs.

· Wildflower and native plant establishment: increases local pollinator abundance, benefiting pollinator-dependent farm crops; increases predatory insect populations, reducing pest pressure; maintains botanical diversity in agricultural landscapes under the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 objectives.

· Local food sourcing (within 30 km): reduces food transport emissions associated with visitor catering; supports regional agricultural production networks; maintains demand for local variety cultivation.

Social outcomes

Local employment and collaboration: agro-tourism that employs local seasonal workers, uses local suppliers, and refers visitors to neighbouring businesses generates a local economic multiplier estimated at 1.8 to 2.5 times the direct visitor spend, based on rural tourism value chain studies (UNWTO, 2022).

· Educational farm visits: structured farm education programmes develop food literacy, ecological understanding, and awareness of agricultural systems among school-age learners. Several European regions run dedicated programmes for this purpose. Bavaria's state-funded 'Erlebnis Bauernhof' programme, for example, has offered curriculum-linked learning days on working farms to primary school classes.

· Traditional knowledge preservation: agro-tourism creates a commercial context for traditional agricultural knowledge, craft techniques, and food production methods that would otherwise exist only in archives or in the memories of an ageing farm population. Active commercial practice is the most effective preservation mechanism for tacit knowledge.

· Workload sustainability: designing agro-tourism programmes to fit within the farm family's available time and energy is a social sustainability measure that protects the long-term viability of the agricultural operation. Operator burnout is documented as a leading cause of agro-tourism business closure in EU rural areas (European Network for Rural Development, 2020).

Economic outcomes

· Income diversification: supplementary agro-tourism income reduces total farm income volatility and provides a buffer against commodity price fluctuations. EU rural development research indicates that farms with two or more income streams have significantly lower closure rates over 10-year periods than single-commodity operations of comparable size.

· Premium pricing for direct sales: farm products sold directly to visitors at the point of production consistently command prices 40 to 120% higher than the same products sold through wholesale or supermarket channels, reflecting visitor willingness to pay for provenance, authenticity, and the experience of meeting the producer.

· Sustainable operating cost reduction: the combination of LED lighting, rainwater harvesting, composting, and local sourcing reduces visitor-related operating costs. Based on typical small agro-tourism operation parameters (200-400 visitors annually), annual savings of 800 to 2,000 EUR are achievable within 24 months of implementation at standard EU input costs.

Self-Assessment Checklist

Score each item 0 (not in place), 1 (partially in place), or 2 (fully in place). Interpret your total: 13-16 = strong sustainability practice across all dimensions; 9-12 = good practice in most areas with identified gaps; 5-8 = foundational practices in place, priority improvements needed; below 5 = significant sustainability development required before expanding visitor numbers

1. No single-use plastic is used in any visitor-facing activity, packaging, or catering service.
If 0 or 1: identify every current single-use plastic item and find a specific reusable or paper-based alternative. Start with the highest-volume item.

2. At least 70% of food and drink served to visitors is sourced from producers within 30 km of the farm.
If 0 or 1: map all food suppliers within 30 km. Contact the nearest producer of each category and establish one new local supply agreement this season.

3. All organic kitchen and food preparation waste from visitor activities is composted on-site.
If 0 or 1: establish a three-bin composting system. Cost: under 90 EUR for equipment. Check whether your municipality provides composting bins at subsidised cost.

4. A rainwater harvesting system of at least 500 litres capacity is installed and used for agricultural or garden purposes.
If 0 or 1: connect a standard polyethylene barrel (500 litres, approximately 70 EUR) to the nearest roof gutter with a diverter fitting. This can be done in half a day with basic tools.

5. At least one local person is employed or collaborates regularly in agro-tourism delivery.
If 0 or 1: contact the nearest agricultural or rural tourism vocational college. Request information about student placement programmes. A three-month placement can provide 3 to 5 days per week of support at no direct cost.

6. The farm's core agricultural practices can be explained in plain language to a visitor with no farming background.
If 0 or 1: write a 200-word plain-language description of one agricultural activity on the farm. Ask a non-farming friend or family member to read it and identify any terms they do not understand. Revise until all terms are clear.

7. Current visitor numbers and session schedules are planned so that they do not conflict with peak agricultural working periods.
If 0 or 1: map your agricultural calendar by month, marking the periods of peak labour demand. Block these periods from visitor booking availability in your scheduling system.

8. The farm is actively working towards or has achieved at least one formal sustainability or environmental certification.
If 0 or 1: download the EU Eco-label tourism accommodation criteria document and complete the self-assessment (Steps 1-5 of Section 7). This takes approximately 3 hours and produces a specific list of the steps required for certification.

9. KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Agro-tourism is defined by the primacy of agriculture.
The farm must remain a working agricultural operation. The visitor offer is built on what the farm already does. If the farming stops, the authenticity — and the commercial offer — disappears with it.
2. Sustainability in agro-tourism is an operational system, not a marketing claim.
Environmental, social, and economic sustainability must all be addressed together. Optimising for one at the expense of the others creates a business that cannot last. Composting, local sourcing, fair workload management, and honest pricing are the practical expression of all three dimensions.
3. Circular economy loops are already present on every farm.
The question is not whether to introduce circular economy principles, but where value is currently leaving the system unnecessarily. Surplus harvest that is discarded, organic waste that goes to landfill, and packaging that is bought once and thrown away are all loops that can be closed at low cost with high combined environmental and financial benefit.
4. Visitor offers must be designed from specific farm assets, not from abstract ideas of what rural tourism should look like.
The offer design framework in Section 4 requires operators to start from what the farm actually has and produces, not from what they imagine visitors want. The most successful agro-tourism offers in European rural markets are those that are specific to the farm's real production, delivered by the people who actually farm the land, and honest about what visitors will experience.
5. Climate adaptation is a business planning requirement, not an environmental aspiration.
Seasonal diversification of visitor offers, water storage infrastructure, and heat-adapted scheduling are investments in business resilience. Operators who treat climate adaptation as a future consideration rather than a present planning requirement are designing visitor programmes around conditions that are already changing.

10. ASSESSMENT

You will work as an independent reviewer of a farm's public sustainability statement. Sort the evidence, decide which words the farm may use, and publish a corrected visitor message. The output is a marked claim card and a short replacement text.

The farm announcement
"Our orchard visits are zero-waste, carbon-neutral and EU Ecolabel-certified. Every guest enjoys a fully sustainable farm experience."

Evidence cards

Card	Information given to the reviewer
A	At the last visit, eight guests used ten disposable drink bottles. Staff weighed 2 kg of food scraps after the tasting.
B	The farm harvested 8 kg of apples that were not sold. No plan for their use has been recorded.
C	Guests travelled in two cars. The farm recorded neither distances nor fuel use and has not calculated the visit's emissions.
D	The farm has not applied for or received EU Ecolabel certification. A member of staff has read a criteria overview online.

Challenge sequence
Round 1 Mark the announcement
Individually underline four separate claims in the announcement. For each, write "supported", "unsupported" or "needs more evidence" and cite the relevant card. Explain in one sentence why an online criteria overview is different from an awarded label.

Round 2 Build an evidence ladder
For each unsupported claim, specify one missing record or verification step. Select either the myclimate calculator or the EU Ecolabel criteria from the module and explain what it could help check and what it cannot prove on its own.

Round 3 Publish a truthful message
Write replacement visitor-facing copy of 40–60 words using only facts in the cards. It may state a specific improvement the farm plans to make, but must clearly distinguish a plan from a current achievement. Add one simple measurement to track the chosen improvement over the next three visits.

Submission and timing
Submit one annotated claim card and the 40–60 word corrected message. Work individually; allow 25 minutes for the challenge and 10 minutes for pair discussion of the final claims.

Scoring guide
Total: 100 points. Satisfactory performance: at least 60 points, with no unsupported certification or carbon-neutral claim in the corrected message.

Criterion	Points	Evidence of competence
Claim classification	30	Each claim is assessed against the cards and the label is not presented as awarded.
Evidence and tool limits	25	Missing records are specific; the chosen tool is described within its actual scope.
Corrected message	30	The 40–60 word copy is clear, attractive and supported by the stated facts.
Follow-up measure	15	The improvement and three-visit measurement are feasible for a small farm.

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VETourismo

MODULE 1.1

SUSTAINABLE AGRO-TOURISM

VETourismo

ADVANCING DIGITAL AND SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN AGRO-TOURISM FOR VETS

Project Number: 2025-1-DE02-KA220-VET-000361332

CC BY SA

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MODULE 1.2

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

VETourismo

ADVANCING DIGITAL AND SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN AGRO-TOURISM FOR VETS

Project Number: 2025-1-DE02-KA220-VET-000361332

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1. INTRODUCTION

Agro-tourism does not just sell a product — it sells a living landscape. When visitors arrive at a farm, they are stepping into an ecosystem: the soil underfoot, the diversity of plants in the orchard, the birds nesting in the hedgerow, the clean water flowing through irrigation channels. The condition of that ecosystem directly shapes the quality of the visitor experience — and, increasingly, whether visitors choose to come at all.

Environmental stewardship is the practice of managing natural resources responsibly so that agricultural land and its biodiversity remain productive and healthy over time. For agro-tourism operators, stewardship is not an optional extra. It is both a legal responsibility — under EU frameworks including the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Cross-Compliance standards — and a commercial asset. Farms that can genuinely demonstrate organic practices, biodiversity-friendly management, water efficiency, and climate resilience attract a growing segment of environmentally motivated visitors who are willing to pay premium prices for authentic, sustainable experiences.
In Greece, where approximately 650 registered agro-tourism enterprises operate in landscapes shaped by millennia of human-agricultural interaction — olive groves, vineyards, terraced hillsides, wetland margins — environmental stewardship is inseparable from the sector's identity and competitiveness (SEAGE, 2024).

Yet the WP2 Educational Needs Assessment identified a critical gap: sustainability and environmental practices are the area of lowest training coverage (mean 2.9/5) relative to their high importance (mean 4.3/5), with a gap of −1.4 points. Focus group participants specifically requested practical, step-by-step guidance on organic certification, climate adaptation, and communicating environmental values to tourists (iAgroCert, 2026). This module responds directly to those needs.



Module 1.2 — Environmental Stewardship is the second sub-module of Pillar 1 (Sustainable Agro-Tourism & Environmental Stewardship) and is developed by iAgroCert (Greece) in partnership with uDevelop e.V. (Germany). It builds on Module 1.1 (Sustainable Agro-Tourism, developed by uDevelop) and equips VET learners with the practical knowledge and operational tools to integrate biodiversity conservation, responsible land use, water management, climate resilience, and agri-food certification into their agro-tourism operations — and to communicate these environmental commitments authentically and compellingly to visitors.

2. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Identify and describe the key biodiversity assets on an agro-tourism farm and explain their value both ecologically and as visitor experience elements.
2. Apply responsible land use and soil health practices that protect the farm's natural capital while maintaining safe, enjoyable visitor access.
3. Design basic water resource management strategies appropriate for small-scale agro-tourism operations, using the Mediterranean as a worked example, including simple water audits and conservation measures.
4. Implement at least two climate-resilient practices adapted to the learner's own climate context, including heat and drought adaptation strategies.
5. Communicate the environmental values and certification credentials of an agro-tourism farm to visitors in a way that is authentic, accessible, and commercially compelling.

3. PRACTICAL BACKGROUND

This section provides the essential concepts you need to understand before applying the practical tools in Section 4. It is deliberately concise. Each concept is explained in plain language with direct relevance to agro-tourism operations.

3.1 Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

Biodiversity refers to the variety of living organisms present in a given area — plants, insects, birds, soil microorganisms, amphibians, and mammals. On an agro-tourism farm, biodiversity is not separate from agricultural production: it underpins it. Pollinators (bees, butterflies, hoverflies) are responsible for approximately one-third of global food production. Soil organisms (earthworms, fungi, bacteria) break down organic matter and release nutrients that crops absorb. Predatory insects control pest populations, reducing the need for pesticide inputs.

These benefits are called ecosystem services — the free, natural processes that healthy ecosystems provide to farms and to society. From a visitor perspective, biodiversity-rich farms offer observable, engaging features: wildflower meadows, birdsong, butterflies, fruit bats at dusk, traditional breeds of livestock. These features are among the most frequently cited reasons visitors choose agro-tourism over conventional hotel accommodation (UNWTO, 2023). Biodiversity is, in short, both ecologically essential and commercially valuable.

3.2 Responsible Land Use and Soil Health

Soil is a living resource, not just a growing medium. One teaspoon of healthy agricultural soil contains more organisms than there are people on Earth. Soil degradation — through erosion, compaction, chemical overuse, or loss of organic matter — reduces farm productivity and its resilience to extreme weather. In Mediterranean contexts, soil erosion is a particularly serious risk on sloped terrain, especially during the intense rainfall events that are becoming more frequent with climate change.

Visitor activity on a farm introduces specific land use challenges: foot traffic on soft ground compacts soil, damages root systems, and creates bare patches that are vulnerable to erosion. Managing visitor movement through designated paths and clear zoning is an essential part of responsible land use — protecting both the ecology and the aesthetic quality of the farm environment.

3.3 Water Resource Management

The Mediterranean climate is characterised by hot, dry summers and concentrated winter rainfall — a pattern that is intensifying under climate change. Water scarcity is already a significant operational challenge for Greek agro-tourism operators, particularly those growing water-intensive crops or offering visitor accommodation. According to the European Environment Agency (EEA, 2024), Greece is among the most water-stressed EU member states, with agriculture accounting for approximately 84% of total water withdrawals.

Water efficiency is therefore both an environmental imperative and a cost-saving measure. For agro-tourism farms, water management encompasses irrigation efficiency, guest accommodation water use, and the collection and reuse of rainwater. Communicating water conservation measures transparently to visitors — through simple signs, guidedexplanations, or digital content — transforms an operational necessity into an authentic sustainability story.

3.4 Agri-Food Certification Schemes

Certification is an official recognition that a farm or product meets defined standards of quality, origin, or production method. For agro-tourism operators, the following EU and national certification schemes are most directly relevant:

An important point: certification is not just about compliance — it is a communication tool. A farm that can show visitors its organic certificate, explain what PDO designation means for its olive oil, or point to the EU Eco-label on its accommodation is building trust and providing memorable, educational content that visitors will share with others.

Certification	What It Covers	Value to Agro-Tourism
PDO (Protected Designation of Origin)	Product qualities/characteristics essentially due to a specific geographical area	High recognition among food-literate visitors; premium pricing; compelling farm story
PGI (Protected Geographical Indication)	At least one stage of production, processing or preparation in a defined area	Geographical identity and tradition; marketing differentiation
TSG (Traditional Speciality Guaranteed)	Traditional composition, production method or processing	Authentic heritage appeal; educational visitor experiences
EU Organic Logo	Production without synthetic pesticides, fertilisers; animal welfare standards	Strong visitor trust; access to organic tourism markets; CAP eco-scheme payments
AGRO 2 (Integrated Management)	Greek national standard (AGRO 2-1 / 2-2) for integrated management of agricultural production, certified by approved bodies	Credible proof of responsible farming practices; useful story for visitors

An important point: certification is not just about compliance — it is a communication tool. A farm that can show visitors its organic certificate, explain what PDO designation means for its olive oil, or point to the EU Eco-label on its accommodation is building trust and providing memorable, educational content that visitors will share with others.

4. PRACTICAL APPLICATION

4.1 Conducting a Farm Biodiversity Audit

A farm biodiversity audit is a simple process of identifying and recording the living organisms and natural habitats present on your farm. You do not need to be a scientist to carry one out. The goal is to build an honest picture of what natural assets you have — and to identify practical steps to improve biodiversity over time. Follow the steps:

1	**Map your farm's habitat types** Walk the entire farm and sketch a simple map. Mark: fields/orchards, hedgerows, stone walls, water features (ponds, streams, ditches), woodland patches, wildflower areas, and bare ground. Each of these is a different habitat type with its own biodiversity value.
2	**Record what you observe** Over 2–3 visits at different times of day, note: which plant species are flowering (especially wildflowers), which insects you see (bees, butterflies, beetles), which birds you hear or see, and any mammal signs (tracks, droppings). The iNaturalist app (Section 7) makes this easy with photograph identification.
3	**Score your current status** Use the simple scoring table below to assess each habitat element. This gives you a baseline to track improvement from year to year.
4	**Identify 3 priority improvements** Based on your scores, choose 3 practical actions you can take within the next 12 months. See the action menu in Step 5.
5	**Plan and implement improvements** Select actions from the menu below and note them in your Farm Biodiversity Action Plan (a simple notebook or spreadsheet is enough). Review progress each spring.



Farm Biodiversity Action Menu — select what works for your farm:

- Plant a wildflower strip: Sow a 1–3 metre strip of native wildflowers along field margins. Cost: minimal. Benefit: pollinators, visitor visual appeal.
- Install a nest box: One bird or bat box per 0.5 ha. Place at 3–5 metres height in a sheltered spot.
- Create a hedgerow section: Plant native shrubs (e.g. hawthorn, wild rose, elderberry) along a fence or field boundary.
- Leave a log pile: Stack 4–6 logs in a shaded corner. Habitat for beetles, fungi, slow worms, and hedgehogs.
- Install a small water feature: Even a 1m² container pond provides habitat for frogs, dragonflies, and drinking water for birds.
- Reduce mowing frequency: Allow at least one area of grass/herbs to grow uncut until September. Cost: zero. Benefit: flowering plants, invertebrates.

4.2 Implementing Responsible Land Use Practices

The core principle of responsible land use for visitor-facing farms is simple: create a clear separation between areas where visitor activity is welcome and areas that need protection. This zoning approach protects soil health, prevents erosion, and maintains the ecological features that make your farm valuable.

Farm Zone	Management Approach	Visitor Access
Active Cultivation Zone (crops, orchards, vineyards)	Designated paths with clear markers; no free roaming. Compacted path surfaces (gravel, woodchip) to prevent soil damage.	Guided access only; supervised tasting / harvest experiences
Biodiversity Conservation Zone (wildflower areas, hedgerows, pond margins)	Observation platforms or viewing points; no entry except for management. Interpretation signage explaining ecological value.	View from designated points; no entry
Visitor Comfort Zone (picnic areas, tasting areas, demo plots)	Hard-surface or reinforced ground. Regular maintenance to prevent erosion and compaction.	Free access; high footfall design

Soil health practices that work on visitor-accessible farms:

- Cover crops: Plant legumes (clover, vetch) or grasses between rows during the off-season to prevent erosion, fix nitrogen, and add organic matter.
- Minimal tillage: Avoid deep ploughing; use shallow tillage or direct seeding where possible to preserve soil structure and organisms.
- Mulching: Apply organic mulch (straw, wood chips) around trees and along paths to suppress weeds, retain moisture, and protect soil from compaction.
- No chemicals in visitor areas: Use no pesticides or herbicides in zones where visitors walk, eat, or interact with crops. This is also a regulatory requirement under most organic and eco-label standards.

4.3 Water Management for Agro-Tourism Operations

Carry out a simple water audit before investing in any new system:
1. List all your water uses: Irrigation (by crop and area), accommodation (showers, sinks, toilets), cleaning (equipment, buildings), visitor facilities (toilets, handwashing).
2. Estimate consumption for each: Read water meters monthly for 3 months and note peak vs. off-season usage.
3. Identify your 2 biggest uses: These are your priority targets for reduction.
4. Apply efficiency measures: See the tool menu below.
5. Communicate to guests: A small sign near showers or toilets — 'This farm collected its own rainwater. Please help us conserve it.' — transforms a technical measure into an engaging sustainability story.

Water efficiency tool menu:
- Drip irrigation: Delivers water directly to plant roots; reduces water use by 30–50% compared to sprinkler systems. Low-cost kits available from agricultural suppliers.
- Rainwater harvesting: Collect roof runoff in a sealed tank. A 100m² roof in Greece collects approximately 50,000 litres per year — enough for toilet flushing and garden irrigation.
- Soil moisture sensors: Low-cost sensors (€15–€40) indicate when soil needs irrigation, preventing overwatering.
- Low-flow fixtures: Replace showerheads and taps in visitor accommodation with low-flow models. Payback period typically under 1 year.
- Grey water reuse: Simple systems reuse washing water for toilet flushing or garden irrigation. Check local regulations before installing.

4.4 Climate Adaptation in Practice

Mediterranean agro-tourism farms face three primary climate change impacts: increasing summer heat and drought, more intense and unpredictable rainfall events, and shifting crop growing seasons. The following adaptations are practical, low-cost, and applicable to most small-scale operations.

Challenge	Adaptation Measure	How to Implement
Summer heat / drought	Drought-tolerant variety selection	Consult local agricultural extension services for heat-tolerant varieties of olives, vines, and
Summer heat / drought	Shade structures for crops and visitors	Install shade netting over heat-sensitive crops. Create shaded visitor seating with pergolas and climbing
Intense rainfall / soil erosion	Contour buffer strips	Plant grass or herb strips across slopes at 5–10 metre intervals to intercept runoff and trap sediment.
Intense rainfall / flooding	Permeable surface materials	Use gravel, woodchip, or permeable paving in visitor paths and parking areas to reduce runoff.
Shifting seasons	Diversify income streams	Develop year-round visitor experiences that are not crop-season dependent: foraging walks, cheese-making,

4.5 Working Towards Certification

Organic certification is the most widely recognised agro-tourism quality signal among European visitors. Achieving it is a process, not an overnight change — but it is achievable for most small farms, and the commercial return is significant.

Step-by-step guide to organic certification in Greece:

1	**Check eligibility** Your farm must have been managed without prohibited substances for at least 2 years (the conversion period). If you are currently using synthetic pesticides or fertilisers, the conversion period begins from the date you stop using them.
2	**Choose a certification body** Greece has 15 accredited organic certification bodies (EBDAA list, AGROCERT). The most widely known are Dio S.A. and Agrocert. Contact 2–3 for comparative quotes.
3	**Submit your application** Provide: land title or lease, farm map, list of fields and crops, description of current management practices, last 2 years of input purchase records.
4	**Annual inspection** An inspector visits once per year (unannounced inspections are also possible). They review records, examine fields, and take soil/tissue samples if needed.
5	**Use the EU Organic Logo correctly** Once certified, you may use the EU organic logo on products and marketing materials. The logo must include the certification body code number (e.g. GR-BIO-XX).
6	**Communicate certification to visitors** Display your certificate visibly. Include a short explanation on your website and in tour commentary: what organic means, why you chose it, what difference it makes to the product.



5. CASE STUDY

Farm name	Eumelia Organic Agrotourism Farm
Location	Gouves village, Laconia, Peloponnese, Greece (~40 km from Sparta)
Size	~20 hectares (50 acres) — olive groves, vineyards, vegetables, herbs
Owners	Frangiskos Karelas and Marilena Karadima — land in the Karelas family since the 1890s; opened to visitors in 2009
Products	Extra-virgin olive oil, natural wine, seasonal vegetables, herbs, preserves; 5 eco-bungalows + guesthouse accommodation
Website	eumelia.com | eumeliashop.com

Background
The Karelas family has cultivated land in Gouves, Laconia since the 1890s. Frangiskos Karelas grew up on this land, later left for Brussels where he worked at the European Parliament, then returned to the Peloponnese with his wife Marilena Karadima with a clear ambition: to transform the historic family holding into a fully certified organic and biodynamic agro-tourism farm that could serve as a working model of sustainable rural enterprise. Eumelia opened its doors to visitors in 2009 (Eumelia, 2024; Producers Market, 2024).

Environmental Stewardship in Practice
Eumelia's approach to environmental stewardship integrates every dimension covered in this module:

- Biodynamic and permaculture farming: All agricultural areas — olive groves, vineyards, vegetable gardens, and herb plots — are managed using biodynamic principles and permaculture methods. Polyculture (multiple species grown together) is practised throughout to reduce plant stress, support soil health, and create habitat diversity. Five documented olive varieties are cultivated (including myrtolia, koroneiki, and agrelia), alongside five grape varieties (kydonista, athiri, moschofilero, agiorgitiko, avgoustiatis). Several of the farm's olive trees are estimated to be up to 1,000 years old.

• Water management — grey water recycling: Grey and black water from guest accommodation is treated and recycled via natural root filtration systems — constructed wetlands that use plant root systems to filter water biologically. The treated water is reused to irrigate olive groves and gardens, significantly reducing freshwater demand.
• Energy systems: Accommodation is heated and cooled using a geothermal system. Solar thermal collectors provide hot water. Wood-burning fireplaces with documented combustion efficiency above 75% supply supplementary heating. LED and low-energy lighting is used throughout. Building materials are eco-friendly and bioclimatic.
• Biodiversity and endangered breed conservation: In collaboration with a Greek NGO, Eumelia houses and helps preserve the Greek black pig — a locally endangered traditional breed. This active participation in a conservation programme provides a direct, authentic biodiversity story for visitors.
• Soil health: Composting and mulching are applied consistently across agricultural areas to build organic matter, suppress weeds, and retain moisture — avoiding the need for synthetic inputs.

Certifications Achieved

Certification	Issuing Body / Notes
DIO Organic Certification	DIO — Certification & Inspection Organisation of Organic Products, Greece. Covers all agricultural products produced on the farm.
European Ecotourism Labelling Standard (EELS)	Granted by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). Eumelia is one of the first five properties in Greece to receive this label.
Slow Food Farm Accreditation	International Slow Food network — recognition of commitment to traditional, sustainable food production and local
BIG SEE Tourism Design Award 2021	Category: Creative Story and Identity as Experience. International recognition of the farm's integrated sustainability narrative.

Recognition and Impact

Eumelia's integrated approach to environmental stewardship and agro-tourism has generated sustained international recognition. The farm has been featured in National Geographic (listed among '5 best farms in Greece' and '15 best European food adventures', both 2021), The Guardian, The New York Times, and Food & Wine. GEO SAISON ranked it among Europe's 100 best hotels in 2023. The farm received the World Hospitality Award 2019 for unique ecotourism accommodations. Its online shop (eumeliashop.com) sells olive oil, olives, herbs, and preserves internationally — turning environmental certification directly into a scalable commercial product line (Eumelia, 2024; National Geographic, 2021).

Why This Case Study Matters for Module 1.2: Eumelia demonstrates that all five environmental stewardship areas covered in this module — biodiversity, responsible land use, water management, climate resilience, and certification — can be integrated into a single, commercially successful agro-tourism operation. None of the practices described are available only to large or well-resourced farms: biodynamic management, composting, root filtration, and Slow Food accreditation are all accessible to small operators willing to invest time, knowledge, and a clear commitment to sustainable practice.

Reflection Question: Eumelia built its environmental stewardship programme around biodynamic principles from the outset, rather than retrofitting it onto an existing conventional operation. What advantages does this starting-from-scratch approach offer — and what challenges does it present compared to an operator who is trying to transition from conventional to sustainable practices? Which stewardship measures from Eumelia's model would be most transferable to a small family farm in your own region, and why?

6. INTERACTIVE EXERCISE

Step 1 — Choose Your Farm (10 minutes)
Select either a farm you know personally OR draw inspiration from Eumelia Organic Agrotourism Farm described in the Case Study (Section 5). If using your own farm or a local farm, note its approximate size, main crops, and any natural features (trees, water, hedgerows, stone walls) that could form trail stops.

Step 2 — Plan Your Route (15 minutes)
Your trail should:
- Take between 45 and 90 minutes to walk at a relaxed pace
- Cover a circular route (start and finish at the same point)
- Visit at least 3 ecologically interesting features
- Avoid entering cultivation zones except on designated paths
- Be accessible to families with children and visitors with reduced mobility where possible

Route map: Create a simple map of your circular route with numbered stops. You can draw it by hand and upload a photo, use a free tool such as Google My Maps, or describe the route in 3-4 sentences.

Step 3 — Describe Your 3 Learning Stops (20 minutes)
For each of your three learning stops, describe the following four points:
Location on farm: Where exactly is the stop?
What the visitor will see: Which natural feature or practice is visible here?
What they will learn: What is the one key environmental message of this stop?
Interactive element: What will visitors do here- look, touch, smell, listen, count or photograph?

Example – Stop 1
Location on farm: wildflower strip along the north boundary.
What the visitor will see: pollinator plants in bloom and a bee observation area.
What they will learn: how native wildflowers support crop pollination.
Interactive element: smell the herbs, listen for birdsong and identify three insects with iNaturalist.

Step 4 — Write a Short Visitor Guide Text (15 minutes)

Write a 3–5 sentence visitor welcome text for your trail. This is the text that would appear on a printed trail leaflet or on the farm website. It should:

- Welcome visitors warmly and set the tone
- Explain what they will experience on the trail
- Highlight 1–2 key environmental features of the farm
- End with an invitation to be curious, slow down, and observe

Submit your route map, the description of your three stops and your visitor guide text together as one document or on the e-learning platform.

Step 5 — Share and Reflect (10 minutes)

Share your trail design with another learner or small group. Give each other feedback on: (1) Is the route feasible and safe? (2) Are the learning stops genuinely educational — or just scenic? (3) Does the visitor guide text communicate both warmth and environmental values? (4) What one thing would you change?

7. DIGITAL TOOL

Tool 1 — eAmbrosia: EU Geographical Indications Register

eAmbrosia is the official EU register of all products protected under PDO, PGI, and TSG designations across the European Union. It replaced the older DOOR database in December 2019 and is maintained by the European Commission. It is free to access at: ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eambrosia/geographical-indications-register/

How an agro-tourism operator uses eAmbrosia:

1. Search for your product or region: Enter your product name (e.g. 'Imathia peach', 'Kalamata olive oil') or your region to see whether a PDO or PGI designation already exists.
2. Read the product specification: Each registered product has a published specification listing the geographical area, production methods, and quality standards it must meet.
3. Check if you qualify: If your product and production methods match the specification, contact the producer group or competent authority listed in eAmbrosia to begin the certification process.
4. Use the logos legally: Once certified, download the official PDO/PGI logos from the EU quality schemes page. These may only be used on products that have received certification — not on the farm generally.
5. Tell the story to visitors: Show visitors the eAmbrosia entry on a tablet or printed card. Explain what PDO means in plain terms: 'This olive oil can only be made here, by people like us, in this specific way. That is why it tastes different from other oils.'

Tool 2 — iNaturalist (Biodiversity Monitoring)

iNaturalist (inaturalist.org) is a free mobile app and website that uses artificial intelligence and community expertise to identify plants, insects, birds, and other organisms from photographs. It is widely used by farmers, educators, and nature guides across Europe for low-cost biodiversity monitoring.

How to use iNaturalist for your farm's biodiversity audit:

1. Download the app: Free on iOS and Android. Create a free account.
2. Photograph organisms on your farm: Take photos of plants in flower, insects on flowers, birds, reptiles, fungi. The app identifies them automatically.
3. Create a project for your farm: Set up a free 'Place' on iNaturalist for your farm's location. All observations you make in that area are automatically collated.
4. Track change over time: Run a 15-minute 'bioblitz' (as many species as you can find) each spring and autumn. After 2 years, you have a measurable trend in biodiversity on your farm.
5. Share with visitors: Show your farm's iNaturalist project page to visitors on a tablet. The list of species observed — perhaps 50–80 organisms — is a compelling demonstration of the farm's ecological richness.

8. SUSTAINABILITY LINK

Environmental stewardship is not a niche concern — it is at the centre of European agricultural and tourism policy for the coming decade. Understanding the policy context helps agro-tourism operators access funding, meet compliance requirements, and position their farm ahead of regulatory changes.

The European Green Deal — What It Means for Agro-Tourism Farms

The European Green Deal (2019) commits the EU to becoming climate-neutral by 2050. Its two major agricultural components directly affect agro-tourism operators:

- Farm to Fork Strategy: Targets 25% of EU agricultural land under organic farming by 2030 (up from ~9% in 2021). Significantly increases EU and national support payments for organic conversion and maintenance. If you are considering organic certification, the financial support framework is stronger now than at any previous time.
- Biodiversity Strategy 2030: Targets restoration of at least 20% of EU land and sea areas by 2030. Introduces legal obligations for high-diversity landscape features on farms (hedgerows, wildflower areas, etc.) under CAP. Farms that already have these features will be at a compliance advantage — and can communicate this proactively to visitors.

CAP Eco-Schemes and Payments — Turning Stewardship Into Income

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2023–2027 introduces Eco-Schemes — voluntary payments for farmers who go beyond mandatory baseline requirements in their environmental management. In Greece, Eco-Scheme payments for practices including organic farming, biodiversity-friendly management, and reduced pesticide use are available through the Greek CAP Strategic Plan 2023–2027 (European Commission, 2023).

Eco-Scheme Practice	Approx. Annual Payment (Greece)	Module 1.2 Connection
Organic farming maintenance	€300–€500/ha (crops); €150–€250/ha (permanent crops)	Section 4.5 — organic certification pathway
Biodiversity-enhancing features (wildflower strips, hedgerows)	€100–€200/ha	Section 4.1 — farm biodiversity action menu
Reduced pesticide / IPM	€80–€120/ha	Supports organic conversion and visitor safety

From Compliance to Competitive Advantage

Many operators view environmental regulations as costs or constraints. This module invites a different perspective: every sustainability measure you implement is potentially a visitor experience element, a marketing story, a premium pricing justification, and a grant-eligible practice. The farms that lead the next decade of European agro-tourism will not be those that meet minimum standards — they will be those that have made environmental stewardship a genuine, visible, and commercially embedded part of their identity. That process begins with the practical steps in this module.

9. KEY TAKEAWAYS

Environmental stewardship is both an ecological responsibility and a commercial strategy. The following five recommendations summarise the most actionable lessons from this module.

Recommendation 1 — Audit before you invest: Before making any environmental improvement, conduct a simple farm biodiversity audit (Section 4.1) and a water audit (Section 4.3). Know your baseline. This takes one day and costs nothing — and it tells you exactly where your biggest improvement opportunities lie.

Recommendation 2 — Zone your farm for visitors: Implement clear zoning between cultivation zones, biodiversity conservation areas, and visitor comfort zones (Section 4.2). Use designated paths, clear signage, and simple physical barriers. Protecting your ecological assets protects your commercial assets.

Recommendation 3 — Start small on biodiversity: You do not need a rewilding project. Plant one wildflower strip this season. Install two nest boxes. Leave one area unmowed until September. Small, consistent actions compound over years into genuinely biodiverse farm landscapes that visitors notice and remember.

Recommendation 4 — Begin your organic conversion timeline: If organic certification is a medium-term goal, contact an approved organic control body and plan the required conversion period: at least 2 years for annual crops and grassland, and 3 years for perennial crops such as olives and vines. In Greece, consult the official list published by ELGO-DIMITRA; DIO is one example. Ask for an introductory consultation and a quote.

Recommendation 5 — Turn stewardship into storytelling: Every environmental measure on your farm — the wildflower strip, the rainwater tank, the organic certificate — is a visitor story waiting to be told. Write 2–3 short explanation cards and place them at relevant points on the farm. A guest who understands why your farm works the way it does is a guest who will recommend it to others.

10. ASSESSMENT

Module 1.2 Assessment Heatwave Decision Path
VETourismo | Section 10 Assessment | Part B Individual decision challenge
Make three linked operational choices as the conditions for a booked farm visit change. Record your choices in a compact decision path. The task assesses judgement under water and climate pressure; it requires neither a farm trail nor a written report.

Starting situation
An olive and herb farm has 12 visitors booked for 14:00. The forecast is 38°C and the outdoor visitor area has little shade. An early morning slot is available the next day. A temporary restriction has reduced the farm's daily water supply from 10 m³ to 7 m³. Essential crop irrigation normally uses 6 m³; the booked visitor group would normally require another 1.5 m³ for drinking water and visitor facilities. Staff have also observed visitors walking on bare soil close to a pollinator habitat.

Checkpoint 1: Water limit
Calculate the usual combined water use and compare it with the new daily supply. Choose ONE initial action and mark it on your decision path:

- A Continue without changes.
- B Reduce drinking water and toilet access to fit the limit.
- C Keep essential visitor services; modify a genuinely non-essential use or postpone the visit if adequate service cannot be provided.

In one sentence, justify the choice using the calculated difference in m³.

Checkpoint 2: Heat and access update
At 12:15 the forecast rises to 40°C. One visitor explains that walking in direct sun for long periods is difficult. Select the next action: (A) run the 14:00 tour as planned; (B) shorten the unshaded walk but keep the same time; or (C) move the visit to the available morning slot or cancel if safe conditions cannot be provided. Give two reasons for your choice and state how visitors will be notified before they travel.

Checkpoint 3: Soil and biodiversity update
The usual access to the tasting area crosses dry bare soil beside the pollinator habitat. Choose a temporary management measure: close the exposed access, use an existing firm-surface alternative if one is known and safe, or postpone access until a safe solution exists. State what evidence you would check before claiming that an alternative route is suitable. Give one simple observation that staff should record over the following month.

Your decision path
On one sheet, show the three selected actions in sequence with arrows. Beneath each arrow write the short reason requested above. Finish with a two-sentence message for the booked visitors and one longer-term change that would make future heatwave visits safer. Learners may draw the path by hand or use a simple digital flowchart.
Submission and timing

Individual work. Submit one decision-path sheet with the water calculation, reasons and visitor message. Allow 30 minutes for the three checkpoints and 3 minutes to explain the final path to the trainer. Diagram design is not graded.

Assessment criteria

Criterion	Points	What the trainer assesses
Water reasoning	25	The usual demand is 7.5 m^3, 0.5 m^3 above the limit, and essential visitor needs are protected.
Heat decision	30	The response to 40°C and the visitor's access need is feasible and clearly justified.
Soil and habitat protection	25	The choice avoids unverified access across sensitive ground and records a useful observation.
Clear decision path	20	The three choices, visitor message and longer-term adjustment are coherent and easy to follow.

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VETourismo

MODULE 1.2

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

VETourismo

ADVANCING DIGITAL AND SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN AGRO-TOURISM FOR VETS

Project Number: 2025-1-DE02-KA220-VET-000361332

Co-funded by the European Union

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VETourismo

MODULE 2.1

DIGITAL MARKETING FOR AGRO-TOURISM OPERATORS

VETourismo

ADVANCING DIGITAL AND SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN AGRO-TOURISM FOR VETS

Project Number: 2025-1-DE02-KA220-VET-000361332

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Co-funded by the European Union

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1. INTRODUCTION

Imagine a small family winery in the Erdut wine region of eastern Croatia. The wine is excellent — award-winning, in fact. The terroir is unique: vineyards embraced on three sides by the Danube, producing wines that have earned platinum medals at international competitions. Yet when a potential visitor searches online for "wine tasting Slavonia" or "agro-tourism Croatia Danube", that winery does not appear. No Google listing. No active Instagram presence. No way to book a tasting online.

This is not a hypothetical scenario. It describes the reality of hundreds of agro-tourism businesses across rural Europe — wineries, but equally livestock farms, farm stays, educational farms, and local food producers. The product exists. The experience is authentic. The potential is real. But without a visible and active digital presence, guests cannot find what operators cannot show them.

Digital marketing is not about becoming a technology expert. It is about using simple, affordable tools to tell your story, reach the right people, and make it easy for them to visit, book, and return. For agro-tourism operators — farmers, winery owners, rural accommodation hosts — digital marketing is increasingly the difference between a full booking calendar and an empty tasting room.

Why this matters for VET learners and rural entrepreneurs
This module is built for people who may have never run a social media campaign, set up a Google business profile, or sent a newsletter. It assumes no prior digital marketing knowledge. Every concept is explained through practical agro-tourism examples, and every tool introduced is free or low-cost.

By the end of this module, you will not just understand digital marketing in theory — you will have created real content, set up real tools, and built the foundations of a measurable digital presence for an agro-tourism business.

Reflection: Think about an agro-tourism business you know or admire. Can you find it easily online? What is the first thing a visitor sees when they search for it? What could be improved?



2. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this module, learners will be able to:

- Apply digital marketing fundamentals to build and improve the online presence of an agro-tourism business, including Google Business Profile setup, social media profiles, and basic website optimisation. [WP2 Finding 1]
- Create engaging content for rural tourism audiences using free tools (Canva, smartphone photography, short video), applying storytelling techniques appropriate for different agro-tourism business types. [WP2 Finding 2]
- Develop a structured social media strategy for an agro-tourism business, including a rationale for selecting platforms (Instagram, Facebook, TikTok) based on target audience and business type, and a 4-week content calendar. [WP2 Finding 2]
- Implement online reputation management and basic data protection practices by responding to reviews, collecting guest feedback and photo/newsletter consent in compliance with GDPR, and maintaining consistent brand communication. [WP2 Finding 1]
- Analyse basic digital performance data using Google Analytics and built-in social media insights to measure reach, engagement, and conversions, and use this data to improve marketing decisions. [WP2 Findings 1 & 3]

3. PRACTICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 The Digital Visibility Gap in Rural Agro-Tourism

Across Europe, agro-tourism is one of the fastest-growing segments of rural tourism. Research from the European Tourism Commission consistently shows that more than 85% of travellers research destinations online before booking (ETC, 2023). Yet the VETourismo WP2 needs assessment reveals that a significant proportion of rural agro-tourism operators — small wineries, farm stays, rural food producers — have minimal or no active digital presence.

The gap is not caused by lack of interest. It is caused by lack of knowledge, time, and confidence. Many operators know they should "do something online" but do not know where to start, which platforms matter, or how much time is realistically required. This module addresses all three barriers.

3.2 Key Digital Channels for Agro-Tourism Operators

Channel	Primary purpose	Cost	Time per week
Google Business Profile	Local search visibility, maps, reviews	Free	30 min/month
Facebook	Community, events, domestic visitors	Free	2–3 hrs/week
Instagram	Visual storytelling, experience-seekers	Free	2–3 hrs/week
TikTok	Reach younger audiences, viral-style potential	Free	2–4 hrs/week
Email / Newsletter	Retain past visitors, seasonal offers	Free (500)	2–3 hrs/month
Website	Central hub; direct bookings	Low cost	1–2 hrs/month

3.3 The Agro-Tourism Content Advantage

Agro-tourism businesses have a natural content advantage: they operate in visually rich, emotionally resonant environments. Vineyards at sunrise. Hand-picked grapes. A tasting room with a view of the Danube. Homemade food from farm produce. These are exactly the kinds of images and stories that attract strong engagement on social media — and they do not require a professional photographer or a marketing budget.

Authentic, genuine content from real farm environments consistently outperforms polished commercial photography in agro-tourism marketing. Visitors choose rural experiences precisely because they want authenticity. Your marketing should reflect that.

3.4 The Same Principles Across Different Agro-Tourism Business Types

This module uses a winery as its main case study because it offers a clear, complete example — but the same digital marketing principles apply directly to any agro-tourism business. The content advantage described above belongs to every type of rural operator, not only wineries:

Business type	Content that resonates
Educational / petting farms	Children feeding animals, seasonal activities (lambing, hatching), school group visits, hands-on demonstrations
Livestock and dairy farms	Cheese- and yoghurt-making process, pasture-to-product story, animal welfare practices, farm-fresh product tastings
Farm stays / rural B&Bs	Morning views, home-cooked breakfast, guest testimonials, the rhythm of daily farm life guests can join
Local food producers (honey, olive oil, jam)	Production process, ingredient sourcing, tasting sessions, packaging and gifting ideas for visitors
Wineries and vineyards	Harvest, winemaking process, tasting experiences, terroir and landscape storytelling

4. PRACTICAL APPLICATION

This section walks you through seven core digital marketing actions that any agro-tourism operator can implement with free tools and a basic smartphone.

4.1 Google Business Profile: Your Most Important Free Tool

Google Business Profile (formerly Google My Business) determines whether your business appears when someone searches on Google Maps or Google Search for agro-tourism experiences near your location.

Step-by-step setup:

- Go to business.google.com and sign in with a Google account.
- Search for your business name. If it does not exist, click “Add your business to Google”.
- Select the correct business category (e.g. “Winery”, “Farm stay”, “Agritourism”).
- Enter your full address or set a service area for businesses without a clear street address.
- Add your phone number and website URL.
- Verify your business — Google sends a postcard or may offer phone/email verification.
- Complete all profile sections: business description (750 characters), opening hours, photos (minimum 10), services offered, and Q&A.

4.2 Social Media: Choosing the Right Platform for Your Business

For agro-tourism, the three most relevant social media platforms are Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. There is no single “best” platform — the right choice depends on your target audience, business type, and marketing objectives. You do not need to be active on all three from the start: choose based on the criteria below, master one platform first, and only add another once it is running smoothly.

How to choose: If your visitors are mainly international or experience-seeking travellers, Instagram is usually the strongest first choice. If your audience is mainly local or domestic, with events and community ties, Facebook often performs better and remains the primary tool for many agro-tourism businesses. TikTok can deliver strong reach with younger audiences (18–34) and viral-style content, but is not essential for every business — a farm stay relying on repeat domestic families, for example, may get more value from Facebook and Google Business Profile than from TikTok.

	Instagram	Facebook	TikTok
Best for	Visual storytelling, experience-seekers, international visitors	Local & domestic audiences, events, groups	Younger audiences (18–34), viral-style reach
Top content	Photos, Reels, Stories of farm life and landscapes	Events, harvest news, seasonal offers, reviews	Short behind-the-scenes videos, harvest Reels
Posting frequency	4–5x per week	3–4x per week	3–5x per week
Consider it your priority if...	You depend on visually striking experiences and want to reach visitors beyond your region	Your visitors are mostly local/domestic and you rely on events, groups, and word-of-mouth	Your audience includes younger travellers and you can commit to short-video content regularly

4.3 Content Creation: Photography and Storytelling

Content types that work well for agro-tourism social media, across business types:

- Behind-the-scenes: harvest process, winemaking, milking, morning chores on the farm
- Seasonal moments: first bud, first harvest, lambing season, first snow on the vineyard or pasture
- Product spotlights: close-up shots of wines, cheeses, honey, or other artisan products in natural light
- Guest experiences: visitors enjoying your tasting room, farm, or B&B table (always ask permission — see Section 4.7)
- Local landscape: sunsets, the river, wildlife, changing seasons
- Short video Reels or TikToks: 15–90 second clips of real agricultural activity
- Use Canva (free tier at canva.com) to create 3–5 reusable branded post templates. Create them once in your brand colours and logo, then simply swap the photo and text for each new post. This reduces content creation time from 45 minutes to under 10 minutes per post.

4.4 The Weekly Content Calendar

Consistency is the most important factor in social media success. A content calendar ensures you always have something ready to post, even during the busiest parts of the agricultural season.

Day	Content type	Example
Monday	Product spotlight	Photo of your featured wine with tasting notes and a food pairing suggestion
Wednesday	Behind the scenes	Short TikTok or Reel of vineyard work, barrel room, or morning harvest
Friday	Experience / invitation	Photo of the tasting room with a reminder that bookings are open for the weekend
Saturday Story	Guest or seasonal moment	Repost a guest photo (with permission) or share a beautiful Saturday morning vineyard shot

4.5 Online Reputation Management

Online reviews are the digital equivalent of word-of-mouth. Research shows that 93% of consumers read online reviews before booking (BrightLocal Consumer Review Survey, cited in Google Business Profile Help, 2024). Always respond to every review — positive and negative — within 48 hours.

- Thank positive reviewers by name and mention something specific from their visit.
- For negative reviews: acknowledge the issue, apologise without being defensive, briefly explain any corrective action. Never argue publicly or disclose personal details about the guest, even to correct their account of events.
- Invite satisfied guests to leave a review with a verbal prompt at the end of a tasting.
- Place a QR code linking to your Google review page on tasting room tables, menus, and wine bottle back labels.

4.6 Email Marketing with Mailchimp

Email marketing delivers the highest return on investment of any digital channel and is particularly effective for agro-tourism businesses with a loyal repeat-visitor base. Unlike social media, you own your email list — no algorithm can remove your audience.

1. Create a free Mailchimp account at mailchimp.com (free up to 500 contacts, 1,000 emails/month).
2. Import existing guest contacts with their written consent (GDPR requirement in the EU — see Section 4.7).
3. Add a sign-up form to your website and a paper sign-up sheet in your tasting room.
4. Send a maximum of 2 newsletters per month. More than that feels intrusive.
5. Newsletter content: harvest updates, new wine releases, seasonal events, special offers for past visitors, recipe and food pairing ideas.

4.7 Data Protection and GDPR in Practice

Digital marketing involves collecting and publishing personal data — photographs of visitors, email addresses, survey responses, and reviews. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) applies to all of these activities for any business operating in the EU, regardless of size. The table below translates GDPR into practical actions for an agro-tourism operator.

Situation
What to do in practice

These are minimum practical steps, not a complete legal compliance guide. Operators handling larger volumes of visitor data, or those uncertain about a specific situation, should consult their national data protection authority or a legal advisor.

Situation	What to do in practice
Photographing visitors	Ask verbally before photographing identifiable guests, or post a visible sign at the entrance stating that photos may be taken for marketing purposes and that guests may opt out. Never publish close-up photos of children without a parent's explicit consent.
Newsletter sign-ups	Collect explicit opt-in consent (a checked box, a signed paper form) before adding anyone to your list. Pre-ticked boxes or assumed consent from a business card are not valid under GDPR.
Online reviews	You may respond publicly to reviews — this is standard and encouraged practice — but avoid disclosing personal details about the guest in your reply.
Feedback forms / surveys	State clearly what the data will be used for and for how long it will be kept. Avoid collecting more information than you actually need.
Storing visitor data	Keep contact lists in one place (e.g. Mailchimp) rather than scattered across notebooks, spreadsheets, and personal phones. Delete contacts who unsubscribe or request removal without delay.

4.8 Understanding Analytics: Measuring What Works

Analytics are how you learn what is working and what is not — without guessing. All major digital platforms provide free analytics tools. You do not need to understand all the numbers: focus on four key metrics.

Metric	What it means	Why it matters for agro-tourism
Reach	How many unique people saw your content	Shows whether your audience is growing and whether non-followers are discovering you
Engagement rate	Likes + comments + shares ÷ reach	High engagement means content resonates. Small accounts typically aim for 3–6% on Instagram (Meta
Clicks / Website visits	How many people clicked your link or visited your website	Direct measure of whether social media is driving interest in bookings
Conversions	Bookings, enquiries, or purchases that came from	The ultimate measure: is digital marketing generating real business?

Where to find your analytics:

- Instagram and Facebook: Go to your professional account → Insights. Review weekly. Check which posts had the highest reach and engagement, and make more content like those.
- Google Business Profile: In your profile dashboard, you will see how many people found your listing, clicked for directions, called you, or visited your website. Review monthly.
- Google Analytics (analytics.google.com — free): Connect to your website to see where your visitors come from, which pages they visit, and whether they complete bookings. Requires a Google account and a small code snippet added to your website.

Practical analytics routine: Spend 20 minutes every Monday morning reviewing last week's top-performing post and last month's Google Business Profile stats. Ask: what worked? Do more of that this week.



5. CASE STUDY

Context

Vinarija Dalj is a family winery in Dalj, in the Erdut wine region of eastern Croatia — a peninsula embraced on three sides by the Danube. With 8 hectares of vineyards across two sites (Rudina and Šušnjar, 120–170 m altitude), the winery produces approximately 1,000 hl of wine per year. The assortment includes 75% white varieties (Welschriesling, Chardonnay, Sylvaner, Muscat Ottonel) and 25% red (Pinot Noir, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon). Wines have received international recognition including platinum and gold medals at major European competitions. The winery operates a tasting room for up to 50 guests, a wine archive of approximately 2,000 bottles, and a spacious outdoor area with Danube views.

Challenge

Despite high product quality and an exceptional location, Vinarija Dalj was digitally invisible. No Google Business Profile. An inconsistently updated Facebook page. A dormant Instagram account. No TikTok presence. No email newsletter. No online booking for tasting experiences. When travellers searched for "wine tasting near Osijek" or "agro-tourism Erdut" on Google Maps, the winery did not appear. Marketing relied almost entirely on word-of-mouth and partnerships with local hotels, which limited reach to a local audience and failed to attract the growing market of wine tourists from Zagreb, the Croatian Adriatic coast, and neighbouring countries.

Action (6-week implementation using free tools only)

1. Google Business Profile: Set up and fully completed. Added 12 photos, wrote a bilingual business description (Croatian and English), listed opening hours and tasting room capacity. Printed a QR code linking to the Google review page and placed it on every tasting table.
2. Instagram: Converted the dormant account to a Business Profile, chosen as the priority platform given the winery's mix of international and experience-seeking visitors. Created 5 reusable branded templates in Canva using the winery's dark green and gold colours. Began posting 4 times per week: wine spotlight, vineyard moment, behind-the-scenes, and weekend invitation.
3. TikTok: Created a new account as a secondary channel, given the winery's ambition to reach younger wine tourists, and began posting 3 short videos per week — harvest footage, wine pouring, and "a day in the vineyard" series. The first Reel of the grape harvest reached 4,200 views organically within 48 hours.
4. Content calendar: Created a simple monthly calendar assigning content themes to each day. Content creation time reduced from 30+ minutes per post to under 8 minutes.
5. Email newsletter: Collected 87 email addresses from the tasting room guest book, using a visible sign-up sheet with a clear consent statement. Set up Mailchimp and sent a first newsletter announcing the new season with a special offer for returning visitors.
6. Analytics review: Set up a weekly 20-minute analytics review every Monday morning, checking Instagram Insights and Google Business Profile stats to identify top-performing content.

Metric	Result
Google profile impressions (monthly)	From 0 to 340 impressions per month
Google reviews	12 new reviews in 3 months (average 4.8 ★)
Instagram followers	From 43 to 312 followers
TikTok reach (first harvest Reel)	4,200 organic views in 48 hours

Lessons learned

- Google Business Profile delivered the fastest results for the least effort — set it up first.
- Instagram was the right primary platform for this specific winery's visitor profile; a farm stay or educational farm with a more domestic audience might reasonably have prioritised Facebook instead.
- TikTok generated strong reach with unpolished content, but was deliberately chosen as a secondary channel — not a replacement for Instagram or Google Business Profile.
- The email newsletter reached past visitors not following on social media — a separate and valuable audience.
- The Monday analytics review created a feedback loop: within 6 weeks, the team could predict which content types would perform well before posting.

Reflection question: Which of the six actions taken by Vinarija Dalj would have the most immediate impact on a business you know? If your business serves a more local or domestic audience, would your platform priorities differ from the winery's?

6. INTERACTIVE EXERCISE

Learning goal: Create a realistic, platform-specific social media calendar for a real or fictional agro-tourism business, applying the content planning principles from Section 4.
Duration: 90 minutes (individual or pairs)

Instructions
Choose your business context:

- Option A: Use Vinarija Dalj (from the case study) as your business.
- Option B: Use a real agro-tourism business from your own region — a winery, farm stay, livestock farm, educational farm, or local food producer.
- Option C: Create a fictional agro-tourism business — define its name, location, type, and products in 3–5 sentences before starting.

Your completed calendar must include:
1. At least 3 posts per week (12 posts total over 4 weeks).

2. A mix of content types: product spotlight, behind-the-scenes, guest experience or invitation, seasonal moment.

3. A caption of 40–80 words for each post.

4. 5 relevant hashtags per post (mix broad and niche: e.g. #ruraltourism and #ErdutskoVinogorje).

5. At least 2 Instagram Story or TikTok video ideas per week (brief description only).

6. One post that includes a call to action linking to your Google Business Profile review page.

7. A one-sentence justification of your chosen primary platform, based on the audience/business-type criteria from Section 4.2.

Metric	Content type	Caption (40–80 words)	5 Hashtags	Story / TikTok idea
Week 1 – Mon				
Week 1 – Wed				
Week 1 – Fri				
Week 1 – Story / TikTok ideas (2)				
Week 2 – Mon				
Week 2 – Wed				
Week 2 – Fri				
Week 2 – Story / TikTok ideas (2)				
Week 3 – Mon				
Week 3 – Wed				
Week 3 – Fri				
Week 3 – Story / TikTok ideas (2)				
Week 4 – Mon				
Week 4 – Wed				
Week 4 – Fri				
Week 4 – Story / TikTok ideas (2)				

Peer feedback

Share your completed calendar with a partner and give each other feedback on:

- Is the content mix varied enough across the 4 weeks?
- Do the captions feel authentic, or do they read like advertisements?
- Are the hashtags a useful mix of broad and niche?
- Is the platform choice well justified given the business type and audience described?

7. DIGITAL TOOL

Tool name	Canva
Purpose	Create professional visual content — social media posts, Stories, TikTok thumbnails, newsletters, flyers — without any design skills
Access	canva.com — free tier is sufficient for all features described in this module
Device	Desktop browser and mobile app (iOS / Android)
Languages	Available in Croatian and 100+ other languages
Companion tools	Meta Business Suite (free — for scheduling Instagram + Facebook posts), Google Business Profile (free — for posting photos and updates)

Why Canva is the right tool for rural agro-tourism operators

Canva's template system is its key advantage for operators with limited time. Instead of creating new designs from scratch, you build 3–5 branded templates once — in your brand colours, with your logo — and then swap out the photo and text for each new post. This reduces content creation time from 45–60 minutes per post to under 10 minutes.

Step-by-step: Creating your first branded Instagram post template

1.Go to canva.com and create a free account.
2.Click "Create a design" and search for "Instagram Post" — select the square 1080 × 1080 px format.
3.Browse the template library. Search for "winery", "farm", or "agro-tourism" to find relevant starting points.
4.Choose a template and start editing. Click the image area → "Upload media" to add your own photo.
5.Update all text elements. Change fonts and colours to match your brand identity.
6.Upload your logo: click "Uploads" → upload your logo file → resize and position in a corner.
7.Click "Share" → "Download" → PNG format.
8.To reuse: click the three dots on your design → "Make a copy". You now have a reusable template.

Limitations to be aware of

- The free tier does not allow removing the Canva watermark from premium (paid) templates. Use free templates or create your own from a blank canvas.
- Advanced features (background remover, brand kit, premium stock photos) require Canva Pro (€13/month). Not necessary for basic agro-tourism content.
- Canva requires internet for full functionality. The mobile app offers limited offline editing of downloaded designs.

8. SUSTAINABILITY LINK

Digital marketing as a driver of sustainable agro-tourism
Effective digital marketing is one of the most powerful tools for building long-term sustainable agro-tourism businesses — and for communicating sustainability values to the visitors who increasingly care about them.

Economic sustainability: Reducing platform dependency
One of the most direct economic sustainability benefits is the reduction of dependency on booking intermediaries. Platforms such as Booking.com typically charge commission rates of 15–25% (publicly listed partner commission ranges, 2024). A winery with 200 tasting bookings per year at €25 each (€5,000 revenue) would pay an estimated €750–1,250 in commissions annually under these rates. A well-maintained Google Business Profile combined with direct booking capability on a website allows operators to take bookings with zero commission. Email newsletters to past guests achieve re-booking rates 2–3 times higher than cold social media posts (Mailchimp Email Marketing Benchmarks, 2024), building a loyal customer base that does not depend on external platforms.

Environmental sustainability: Attracting the right visitors and reducing printed materials
Digital marketing allows operators to attract visitors who genuinely value sustainable, low-impact rural experiences. By communicating sustainable farming practices — organic certification, no herbicides, hand-picking, circular water use — through social media and Google Business Profile, operators signal their values to visitors who share them. This targeted communication reduces the environmental footprint of tourism by attracting smaller numbers of higher-value, longer-staying visitors who engage deeply with the experience — aligned with the European Green Deal's quality-over-quantity approach to rural tourism.

A second, more direct environmental benefit is the replacement of printed promotional materials with digital alternatives. A Google Business Profile, an Instagram menu of tasting options, or a QR-linked product catalogue removes the need for printed brochures, flyers, and price lists that are often reprinted every season as prices or offerings change. Beyond reducing paper and ink use, digital materials can be updated instantly — a price change, a sold-out experience, or a seasonal closure can be corrected the same day, rather than requiring an entire batch of printed material to be discarded and reprinted.

Supporting local value chains and regional products
Digital marketing is also a practical tool for strengthening local and regional value chains.

When an agro-tourism business features the specific producers, cooperatives, or artisans behind its food and drink — the neighbouring olive grower, the local cheese maker, the regional bakery supplying the breakfast table — it extends digital visibility to businesses that may not have their own marketing capacity. A wine tasting post that names the specific vineyard plot, grape variety, and harvest year does more than promote a single business: it builds the visibility and reputation of an entire regional product category (e.g. Erdut wines, Baranja honey, Slavonian kulen), which benefits all producers in that value chain, not only the one posting.

Social sustainability: Keeping rural communities visible
Digital marketing is also an act of cultural preservation. When a small family winery shares the story of hundred-year-old grape varieties, traditional winemaking techniques, or the unique microclimate of the Erdut vineyards, it makes rural heritage visible to audiences far beyond the immediate region. This visibility attracts visitors, generates income, and provides economic reasons for younger generations to remain in rural areas and continue traditions — one of the core challenges facing rural Europe.

European Green Deal alignment: This module supports the Farm to Fork Strategy's goal of strengthening short supply chains and local food systems by helping agro-tourism operators communicate the provenance and sustainability of their products directly to consumers and by promoting the regional producers connected to their value chain, reducing dependence on long, extractive distribution chains and printed promotional waste.

9. KEY TAKEAWAYS

The six most important lessons from this module:

- Your Google Business Profile is the most important free digital tool available to you. Set it up first, complete it fully, and maintain it monthly. It is the difference between being found and being invisible.
- Choose your social media platform based on your audience and business type, not by default. Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok each serve different visitor profiles — pick the one that matches yours before expanding to others.
- Consistency beats quality. Three average posts per week, every week, will outperform one perfect post per month. Use Canva templates and a content calendar to make consistency achievable even during the harvest season.
- Your farm, vineyard, or rural landscape is your greatest content asset — whatever type of agro-tourism business you run. Authentic photos and short videos of real agricultural life attract more engagement than polished commercial imagery.
- Build your email list from day one, with proper consent. Unlike social media, you own your email list — it cannot be removed by an algorithm change, and GDPR-compliant collection protects both you and your guests.
- Check your analytics every week. Twenty minutes every Monday morning reviewing Instagram Insights and your Google Business Profile stats will tell you exactly what is working — and help you do more of it.

Three actions you can take this week

1.Search for your business on Google Maps. If no profile appears, go to business.google.com and begin the setup process today.

2.Take 10 photos of your business environment with your smartphone. These are your first week's content.

3.Create a free Canva account and spend 30 minutes building your first branded Instagram post template.

10. ASSESSMENT

Practical Assignment (Primary Assessment)
Submit the following four components as your module assessment:
1.Completed 4-week Instagram content calendar (12 posts + 8 Story/TikTok ideas) using the template from Section 6, including the platform-choice justification.
2.Brief business profile (half page): name, location, business type, products and experiences offered, target visitor profile.
3.Justification (3–5 sentences): explain your content choices for Week 1 and how they address at least 2 of the WP2 findings from this module.
4.Google Business Profile description (150–200 words) for your chosen business, written in English and ready to copy-paste into the Google Business Profile setup form.

Criterion (25% each)	Excellent	Satisfactory	Needs improvement
Content variety	Clear, varied mix of content types across all 4 weeks	Some variety present, occasional repetition	Most posts follow the same single format
Authenticity and tone	Captions read as genuine and specific to the business	Mostly authentic, occasionally generic	Reads like generic advertising copy
Practical applicability	Calendar could be used by a real operator with no changes	Mostly usable, minor adjustments needed	Not realistic for an actual weekly routine
WP2 alignment justification	Clear, specific link to 2+ WP2 findings and platform choice	General link to findings, platform choice reasoning is brief	Findings and platform choice not addressed

Assessment note: There are no wrong creative choices. Assessment focuses on the quality of thinking and the practical usability of the output, using the rubric above as a shared reference point for trainers grading multiple submissions.

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VETourismo

MODULE 2.1

DIGITAL MARKETING FOR AGRO-TOURISM OPERATORS

VETourismo

ADVANCING DIGITAL AND SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN AGRO-TOURISM FOR VETS

Project Number: 2025-1-DE02-KA220-VET-000361332

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VETourismo

MODULE 2.2

SMART TECHNOLOGIES FOR AGRO-TOURISM

VETourismo

ADVANCING DIGITAL AND SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN AGRO-TOURISM FOR VETS

Project Number: 2025-1-DE02-KA220-VET-000361332

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1. INTRODUCTION

Digital technologies are becoming an increasingly important part of everyday life and have significantly changed the way people plan, experience and share travel activities. This development also affects agro-tourism businesses. Visitors now expect easy access to information, online booking options, digital communication and engaging experiences that enhance their visit. For agro-tourism operators, smart technologies provide practical opportunities to improve visitor services, strengthen competitiveness and create more attractive rural tourism experiences.

Unlike large tourism companies, many agro-tourism businesses operate with limited staff, budgets and technical expertise. Smart technologies can help overcome these challenges by simplifying communication, reducing administrative tasks and improving visitor engagement. Technologies such as Google Business Profiles, QR-code information systems, online booking tools and digital feedback platforms can be implemented at relatively low cost while providing significant benefits for both visitors and businesses.

For vocational education and training (VET) learners, understanding smart technologies is increasingly important. Future professionals working in agriculture, tourism and rural entrepreneurship need to develop digital competences that allow them to adapt to changing visitor expectations and support innovation within rural businesses. By learning how to select and apply appropriate technologies, learners can contribute to the sustainable development of agro-tourism destinations and improve the quality of visitor experiences.

Practical Scenario
Imagine a family searching online for a farm experience during their summer holiday. They compare different destinations, read visitor reviews, check photographs and look for booking information. One farm provides clear online information, interactive visitor guides and simple booking options. Another farm has limited information available online and no digital communication channels.
Which business is more likely to attract visitors?
This simple example demonstrates how smart technologies influence visitor decisions and why digital tools have become essential for modern agro-tourism businesses.

Reflection Question
Think about an agro-tourism business you know.
How do visitors currently find information about the business, and which smart technology could most easily improve their experience before, during or after their visit?



2. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this module, learners will be able to:

LO1
Analyse the visitor journey of an agro-tourism business and identify opportunities for the use of smart technologies before, during and after a visit.
LO2
Apply digital tools such as Google Business Profile, QR-code information systems and visitor feedback platforms to improve visitor experiences and communication.
LO3
Design practical digital solutions that enhance accessibility, visitor engagement and information delivery within agro-tourism settings.
LO4
Develop a smart technology improvement plan that addresses the needs of visitors while supporting business objectives and sustainability goals.
LO5
Evaluate the benefits and limitations of different smart technologies and select appropriate solutions for rural tourism businesses.

WP2 Findings Addressed
This module directly responds to the following findings identified during the VETourismo WP2 research phase:

- Low digital skills among agro-tourism operators by introducing practical and user-friendly digital tools.
- Weak online visibility and digital marketing capacity by focusing on digital visitor communication and online presence.
- Limited practical learning and work-based exposure through realistic case studies, applied exercises and a competency-based assessment task.

Expected Competence Development
By the end of the module, learners will be able to make informed decisions regarding the selection and implementation of smart technologies in agro-tourism businesses and contribute to more innovative, visitor-oriented and sustainable rural tourism experiences.
Reflection Question
Which of the learning objectives is most relevant to your current work, studies or future professional role, and why?

3. PRACTICAL BACKGROUND

Digitalisation has become one of the most important drivers of innovation and competitiveness in the tourism sector. Visitors increasingly rely on digital technologies before, during and after their travel experiences. This trend also affects agro-tourism businesses, which are expected to provide accessible information, convenient booking options and engaging visitor experiences through digital channels.

Agro-tourism combines agricultural production, rural culture and tourism services. Unlike traditional tourism businesses, agro-tourism operators often have limited financial and human resources while simultaneously managing farming activities and visitor services. Smart technologies can help overcome these challenges by improving communication, reducing administrative workload and enhancing visitor satisfaction.

Smart technologies refer to digital tools and systems that support information management, communication, decision-making and visitor interaction. In agro-tourism, these technologies are not necessarily complex or expensive. Many effective solutions are affordable and can be implemented by small businesses with limited technical expertise.

Common smart technologies used in agro-tourism include online booking systems, Google Business Profiles, QR-code information stations, digital maps, virtual tours, visitor feedback systems and mobile communication tools. These technologies help visitors access information quickly and improve the overall quality of the visitor experience.

The visitor journey has become increasingly digital. Before visiting a destination, tourists typically search online, compare alternatives, read reviews and gather information through websites and social media. During their visit, they expect easy access to information, navigation support and interactive learning opportunities. After the visit, they often share experiences online, leave reviews and recommend destinations to others.

For agro-tourism businesses, digital visibility is therefore essential. A farm that cannot easily be found online may lose potential visitors even if it offers high-quality experiences. Digital tools help businesses increase visibility, strengthen customer relationships and improve operational efficiency.

However, many rural businesses face challenges when adopting digital technologies. Common barriers include limited digital skills, lack of time, financial constraints and insufficient access to training opportunities. These challenges were identified through the VETourismo WP2 research and highlight the importance of practical and user-friendly digital solutions.

Smart technologies should not be viewed as a replacement for personal interaction. Instead, they should support communication and create more meaningful experiences for visitors. The most successful agro-tourism businesses combine authentic human interaction with appropriate digital tools to create memorable and educational experiences.

Reflection Question:

Consider an agro-tourism business in your region. Which digital technologies are currently being used, and which additional technologies could improve the visitor experience without requiring significant investment?

4. PRACTICAL APPLICATION

The practical implementation of smart technologies should focus on improving the visitor experience while supporting business objectives. Rather than adopting technology for its own sake, agro-tourism businesses should identify specific visitor needs and select technologies that address those needs effectively.

4.1 – Analyse the Visitor Journey

A visitor journey describes the different stages of interaction between visitors and an agro-tourism business. Understanding this journey helps operators identify opportunities for digital improvement.

Before the Visit

Potential visitors search for information, compare alternatives and make booking decisions.

Smart technologies that support this stage include:

- Google Business Profile
- Business websites
- Online booking platforms
- Social media channels
- Virtual tours

The objective is to make information easy to find and encourage visitors to choose the business.

During the Visit

Visitors require information, orientation and engaging experiences.

Recommended technologies include:

- QR-code information stations
- Digital visitor maps
- Interactive information boards
- Mobile visitor guides
- Visitor feedback systems

These tools help visitors explore independently while providing access to additional information.

After the Visit

Visitors often continue their relationship with the business by sharing experiences, leaving reviews or planning future visits.

Useful technologies include:

- Online review platforms
- Email newsletters
- Customer relationship management systems
- Digital feedback surveys

Maintaining contact after the visit can increase repeat visits and encourage recommendations.

4.2 – Improve Digital Visibility
Google Business Profile is often the most effective starting point for agro-tourism businesses.

Essential information should include:

- Business description
- Contact details
- Opening hours
- Location
- Photographs
- Visitor reviews

Profiles should be reviewed and updated regularly to ensure accuracy.

4.3 – Create Digital Learning Experiences
Smart technologies can transform traditional farm visits into interactive educational experiences.
QR-Code Learning Trails
QR codes can be placed throughout the farm to provide information about:

- Crops and production systems
- Livestock management
- Sustainability practices
- Local history and traditions
- Biodiversity initiatives

Visitors can access information using their own mobile devices, reducing the need for printed materials.
Digital Storytelling
Short videos, photographs, podcasts and interactive maps can help explain farming activities and local culture in an engaging way.

Digital storytelling allows businesses to share information that may not be visible during a standard visit.
Virtual Tours
Virtual tours provide visitors with an opportunity to explore a farm before arrival. They can also improve accessibility for schools, older visitors or individuals who cannot visit physically.

4.4 – Collect and Use Visitor Feedback
Visitor feedback is essential for continuous improvement.
Google Forms and other survey tools can be used to collect information about:

- Visitor satisfaction
- Learning outcomes
- Service quality
- Suggestions for improvement

Feedback should be analysed regularly and used to inform future decisions.

4.5 Integrating Smart Farming Technologies into Visitor Experiences

Purpose

While digital communication tools improve visitor information and engagement, smart farming technologies provide visitors with direct insights into modern, innovative and sustainable agricultural production. Integrating these technologies into agro-tourism activities creates educational value, strengthens visitor experiences and demonstrates how agriculture is adapting to future challenges.

Smart Irrigation Systems

Modern irrigation systems use soil moisture sensors and weather data to optimise water use. During guided tours, visitors can observe how irrigation is automatically adjusted according to plant needs, demonstrating sustainable water management in practice.

Visitor benefit

- Better understanding of resource-efficient farming
- Practical demonstration of climate adaptation

Weather Stations

Digital weather stations continuously monitor temperature, rainfall, humidity and wind conditions.

Visitors can compare current weather data with farming decisions such as irrigation, harvesting or crop protection.

Visitor benefit

- Better understanding of agricultural decision-making
- Increased awareness of climate influences

GPS-Guided Machinery

Many modern agricultural machines operate using GPS guidance and precision farming technologies.

Demonstrating GPS-supported machinery allows visitors to experience how digital innovation improves efficiency while reducing fuel consumption and unnecessary field operations.

Visitor benefit

- Insight into modern precision agriculture
- Better understanding of sustainable farming practices

Soil Sensors
Soil sensors measure moisture, temperature and other important soil characteristics.
Visitors can compare sensor data from different fields and discuss how farmers use this information to optimise crop production.
Visitor benefit

- Interactive learning experience
- Understanding of sustainable soil management

Drone Demonstrations
Drones are increasingly used for crop monitoring, field mapping and environmental observation.
Short demonstrations or recorded flight videos help visitors understand how aerial technologies support modern agriculture.
Visitor benefit

- Innovative visitor attraction
- Practical introduction to digital agriculture

Livestock Monitoring
Wearable sensors can monitor animal health and activity.
Agro-tourism businesses offering livestock experiences can explain how digital monitoring contributes to animal welfare and responsible livestock management.

Visitor benefit

- Better understanding of animal welfare
- Insight into modern livestock production

Practical Recommendation
Smart farming technologies should always complement personal explanations provided by guides and farmers. Visitors are generally more engaged when they can combine digital information with practical demonstrations and direct interaction.

4.6-Practical Implementation Checklist
☐ Google Business Profile established and updated
☐ Website mobile-friendly
☐ Online booking available
☐ Visitor information accessible digitally
☐ QR-code information stations installed
☐ Visitor feedback system implemented
☐ Social media channels maintained
☐ Sustainability information available digitally
☐ Visitor data collected responsibly and in compliance with data protection regulations



5. CASE STUDY

Background
Smart Valley Farm is a family-owned agro-tourism business located in Lower Saxony, Germany. The farm combines agricultural production with educational activities, guided farm tours, direct sales of regional products and seasonal events for families and schools.Although the business enjoys an excellent reputation among local residents, it attracts relatively few visitors from outside the region. The owners recognise that many potential guests now search online before deciding where to visit and increasingly expect digital services that make planning and experiencing a farm visit simple and enjoyable.

At the same time, the farm wishes to preserve its authentic rural character while introducing modern technologies that improve visitor experiences without replacing personal interaction.

Challenge
Before introducing smart technologies, the farm experienced several challenges that are common among small agro-tourism businesses:

- limited online visibility and poor search engine presence;
- no online booking system;
- repeated telephone enquiries regarding opening hours, directions and activities;
- limited educational information during self-guided visits;
- visitor feedback collected only informally;
- little opportunity to demonstrate modern agricultural technologies to visitors.

With limited financial resources and only a small team, the owners needed practical, affordable and easy-to-maintain solutions.

Action
After participating in a training programme on digitalisation and smart technologies in agro-tourism, the owners implemented several low-cost improvements.
1. Google Business Profile
The farm created a complete Google Business Profile including opening hours, photographs, contact information, visitor reviews and seasonal activities. This significantly improved online visibility and made it easier for visitors to find reliable information.

2. Online Booking
A simple online booking form was integrated into the farm's website, allowing visitors to reserve guided tours and educational programmes without contacting staff directly.

3. QR-Code Learning Trail
QR codes were installed throughout the farm, linking visitors to additional information about crop production, biodiversity, renewable energy, local history and sustainable farming practices.

4. Digital Visitor Feedback
Visitors could scan a QR code at the end of the tour to complete a short online questionnaire about their experience and provide suggestions for improvement.

5. Digital Storytelling
Short videos, photographs and interactive content were published on the farm's website and social media channels to explain farming activities, seasonal work and local traditions.

6. Smart Farming Demonstrations
To strengthen the educational value of the visitor experience, the farm also introduced demonstrations of modern smart farming technologies.
During guided tours, visitors observed:

- GPS-guided tractors operating in crop production;
- a digital weather station used for farming decisions;
- soil moisture sensors supporting efficient irrigation;
- drone imagery showing crop development and biodiversity areas.

Rather than focusing on technical details, guides explained how these technologies contribute to sustainable farming, climate adaptation and resource efficiency.
This combination of digital communication tools and smart farming demonstrations created a more engaging and educational visitor experience.

Indicator	Before Implementation	After 12 Months
Annual Visitors	approx. 1,400	approx. 1,850
Online Enquiries	Low	Increased by approximately 40%
Google Reviews	18	57
Average Rating	4.3	4.8
Repeat Visitors	Limited	Increased by approximately 20%

Lessons Learned

The experience of Smart Valley Farm demonstrates that successful digitalisation does not require large financial investments. Carefully selected smart technologies can significantly improve visitor communication, increase operational efficiency and strengthen business competitiveness.

The case study also shows that combining digital communication tools with demonstrations of smart farming technologies creates added educational value. Visitors gain a better understanding of modern, sustainable agriculture while enjoying more interactive and memorable farm experiences.

For small agro-tourism businesses, gradual implementation supported by staff training and regular visitor feedback is often the most effective approach to digital innovation.

6. INTERACTIVE EXERCISE

Design a Smart Agro-Tourism Visitor Experience
Learning Goal
The purpose of this exercise is to enable learners to apply the knowledge and practical examples introduced throughout this module in a realistic agro-tourism context.
Learners will analyse the complete visitor journey, identify opportunities for digital innovation and develop practical recommendations that improve visitor experiences while supporting business efficiency and sustainability.

The activity encourages collaboration, critical thinking and problem-solving by requiring learners to select technologies that are appropriate, affordable and easy to implement within a real or fictional agro-tourism business.
By completing this exercise, learners will gain practical experience in planning digital improvements and evaluating their potential impact on visitors, businesses and rural communities.

Reflection Question
Imagine you are responsible for improving the visitor experience at Smart Valley Farm.
Which additional smart technology—or combination of technologies—would you introduce next, and how would it improve both visitor satisfaction and the sustainability of the business?

Scenario
A family-owned agro-tourism business would like to modernise its visitor experience while preserving its authentic rural character.
The business currently offers:

- guided farm tours;
- local food tastings;
- educational activities;
- seasonal events.

Most communication still relies on traditional methods and only a limited number of digital tools are currently in use.
The owners have identified several challenges:

- limited online visibility;
- difficulty attracting younger visitor groups;
- repetitive visitor enquiries;
- limited visitor interaction during self-guided visits;
- little use of smart farming technologies for educational purposes;
- lack of structured visitor feedback.

The owners have a modest budget and are looking for practical, affordable and sustainable digital solutions.
Your task is to act as a digital innovation team and develop recommendations that improve the overall visitor experience.

Instructions
This activity can be completed individually or in groups.

Learners working independently should select an agro-tourism business in their own region—or their own business—and complete the same analysis and planning process.
Groups should consist of three to five participants.
Complete the following steps.

Step 1 – Analyse the Visitor Journey
Identify the different stages of the visitor experience:

- Before the visit
- During the visit
- After the visit

For each stage discuss:

- visitor expectations;
- current challenges;
- opportunities for digital improvement.

Step 2 – Identify Challenges
List the main challenges currently faced by the agro-tourism business.
Examples include:

- limited online visibility;
- complicated booking procedures;
- insufficient visitor information;
- limited accessibility;
- low visitor engagement;
- lack of digital learning opportunities.

Prioritise the challenges according to their impact on visitor satisfaction.

Step 3 – Select Smart Technologies
Choose at least three technologies.
Possible examples include:

- Google Business Profile
- QR-Code Learning Trail
- Online Booking System

- Visitor Feedback Survey
- Digital Visitor Map
- Virtual Tour
- Mobile Information Guide
- Social Media Integration
- Smart Irrigation Demonstration
- Weather Station Display
- GPS Machinery Demonstration
- Drone Demonstration

For each technology explain:
- why it was selected;
- which visitor need it addresses;
- expected benefits;
- estimated implementation effort.

Step 4 – Develop an Improvement Plan
Prepare a practical implementation plan including:
- selected technologies;
- expected visitor benefits;

required resources;
- estimated implementation timeline;
- possible challenges;
- sustainability benefits.

Materials Required
- Flipchart paper or digital whiteboard
- Markers or digital collaboration software
- Internet access
- Smartphones or laptops
- Visitor Journey Worksheet (optional)

Duration
Preparation and analysis: 30 minutes
Development of the improvement plan: 20 minutes
Presentation and discussion: 10 minutes
Total duration: approximately 60 minutes

Expected Outputs
Each learner or group should produce:
Output 1
Visitor Journey Analysis

Output 2
Smart Technology Recommendation Table

Output 3
Implementation Plan

Output 4
Five-minute Presentation

Assessment Method
The exercise is assessed through facilitator feedback and peer review.
Assessment Criteria
Criterion
Weight
Understanding of visitor needs
25%
Relevance of selected technologies
25%
Practical feasibility
20%
Sustainability considerations
15%
Quality of presentation and justification
15%

Trainer Notes
Encourage learners to focus on technologies that are realistic for small and medium-sized agro-tourism businesses rather than expensive or highly complex solutions.
Support discussion on how digital communication tools and smart farming technologies can complement one another to create more engaging visitor experiences.
Remind learners that successful digitalisation is not about using as many technologies as possible. The goal is to select solutions that genuinely improve visitor satisfaction, strengthen business performance and contribute to sustainable rural development.
During the presentations, encourage participants to justify their choices by considering visitor needs, implementation costs, accessibility and long-term sustainability.

Reflection Question
Which recommendation from today's exercise could realistically be implemented within an agro-tourism business in your region during the next six months? Explain your choice.

7. DIGITAL TOOL

Google Business Profile is a free online tool that enables businesses to manage how they appear on Google Search and Google Maps. For agro-tourism operators, it is one of the most accessible and effective ways to improve online visibility, communicate with visitors and provide accurate information before a visit.
As most visitors begin their travel planning online, an up-to-date business profile helps potential guests quickly find essential information, compare destinations and make informed decisions.
For small and family-run agro-tourism businesses, Google Business Profile represents an affordable first step towards digitalisation and often provides immediate benefits without requiring specialist technical knowledge.

Why Is It Useful for Agro-Tourism?
Many agro-tourism businesses are located in rural areas where visitors may be unfamiliar with local roads, opening hours or available activities.
A well-maintained Google Business Profile enables businesses to provide:

- accurate location information;
- opening hours;
- contact details;
- photographs;
- visitor reviews;
- seasonal activities;
- frequently asked questions;
- website and booking links.

Providing this information online reduces repetitive enquiries, improves visitor confidence and supports a positive first impression before visitors even arrive.

How to Access the Tool
Website
https://business.google.com
Requirements

- Google Account
- Internet Access
- Business Verification

Cost
Free

Step-by-Step Implementation
Step 1 – Create or Claim Your Business Profile
Search for your business on Google.
If a profile already exists, claim ownership.
If no profile exists, create a new profile and complete the registration process.

Google Business Profile is a free online tool that enables businesses to manage how they appear on Google Search and Google Maps. For agro-tourism operators, it is one of the most accessible and effective ways to improve online visibility, communicate with visitors and provide accurate information before a visit.
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Website
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Requirements

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- Internet Access
- Business Verification

Cost
Free

Step 5 – Encourage Visitor Reviews
Positive reviews improve both credibility and online visibility.
Businesses should encourage satisfied visitors to leave reviews and should respond professionally to both positive and negative feedback.
Constructive responses demonstrate commitment to customer service and continuous improvement.

Step 6 – Maintain Your Profile
A Google Business Profile should be treated as an active communication tool rather than a one-time setup task.
Regularly:

- update opening hours;
- upload new photographs;
- announce seasonal events;
- answer visitor questions;
- monitor visitor reviews.

Benefits
For Visitors

- quick access to reliable information;
- easier navigation;
- greater confidence before booking;
- improved communication;
- better trip planning.

For Businesses

- increased online visibility;
- improved visitor communication;
- reduced administrative workload;
- enhanced reputation management;
- stronger digital presence.

Limitations

Although Google Business Profile offers significant advantages, it also requires continuous attention.

Businesses should consider that:

- information must be kept up to date;
- internet access is required;
- visitor reviews require active management;
- inaccurate information may negatively affect visitor confidence.

When maintained regularly, however, the benefits greatly outweigh these limitations.

Practical Example

A family-owned agro-tourism business updates its Google Business Profile by adding professional photographs, seasonal opening hours, visitor information and links to online booking.

The profile also highlights demonstrations of GPS-guided machinery and biodiversity projects taking place on the farm.

Within several months:

- online searches increase;
- visitor enquiries rise;
- more visitors use Google Maps for navigation;
- customer reviews improve;
- visitors arrive better informed and require less basic information before booking.

Additional Recommended Digital Tools

Tool	Cost	Website	Practical Application
Google Forms	Free	forms.google.com	Collect visitor feedback and evaluate visitor satisfaction.
Canva	Free / Pro	canva.com	Design brochures, visitor maps, QR-code posters and social media content.
ThingLink	Free / Paid	thinglink.com	Create interactive visitor experiences, virtual tours and educational hotspots.
QR Code Generator	Free	qr-code-generator.com	Link visitors to digital information, videos, maps and learning materials.

Reflection Question

Which information would be most important for a visitor searching for your agro-tourism business online? How could Google Business Profile help improve your organisation's digital visibility and visitor communication?

GDPR Reminder

When collecting visitor feedback, publishing photographs or processing personal information, agro-tourism businesses must comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Businesses should:

- inform visitors about how their personal data will be used;
- obtain explicit consent before publishing identifiable photographs;
- ensure that survey responses are stored securely;
- process personal information only for legitimate and transparent purposes.

Responsible data management strengthens visitor trust and supports professional business practices.

8. SUSTAINABILITY LINK

Smart Technologies as a Driver of Sustainable Agro-Tourism

Introduction

Sustainability is one of the fundamental principles of modern agro-tourism. Visitors increasingly seek authentic experiences that respect the environment, support local communities and contribute to the long-term viability of rural areas. Smart technologies can support these objectives by improving resource efficiency, strengthening communication and enhancing visitor engagement.

When carefully selected and appropriately implemented, digital technologies can contribute to all three dimensions of sustainability—environmental, social and economic sustainability. At the same time, they help strengthen local value chains, improve business resilience and encourage more sustainable visitor behaviour.

Importantly, technology alone does not create sustainability. Its value depends on how it is integrated into everyday business practices and combined with responsible management and authentic visitor experiences.

Environmental Sustainability

Smart technologies can help agro-tourism businesses use natural resources more efficiently while maintaining or improving the quality of visitor experiences.

Reducing Paper Consumption

Digital visitor information, QR-code learning trails and mobile visitor guides can help reduce the need for printed brochures, maps and information sheets. This may reduce paper consumption while making information easier to update and more accessible to visitors.

Improving Resource Efficiency

Digital technologies support more efficient management of farm resources.

Examples include:

- smart irrigation systems using soil moisture sensors;
- digital weather stations supporting farming decisions;
- online booking systems that optimise visitor scheduling;
- digital communication tools that reduce unnecessary travel and printed materials.

These technologies can contribute to more efficient use of water, energy and other resources.

Supporting Environmental Awareness

Digital storytelling, QR-code information stations and interactive learning tools allow visitors to better understand sustainable agricultural practices.

Possible learning topics include:

- biodiversity conservation;
- renewable energy;
- climate adaptation;

- sustainable farming systems;
- water management;
- soil conservation.

Providing accessible information encourages visitors to reflect on environmental challenges and promotes more responsible behaviour.

Social Sustainability

Agro-tourism plays an important role in connecting visitors with agriculture, local traditions and rural communities.

Smart technologies can strengthen these connections while improving accessibility and inclusion.

Improving Accessibility

Digital technologies can make visitor experiences more inclusive by offering:

- multilingual information;
- audio guides;
- mobile-friendly content;
- virtual tours;
- accessible digital learning materials.

These solutions enable a wider range of visitors to participate in agro-tourism activities regardless of language, age or physical ability.

Increasing Visitor Engagement

Interactive technologies encourage visitors to participate actively rather than simply observe.

Examples include:

- QR-code learning trails;
- interactive maps;
- digital quizzes;
- augmented or virtual reality experiences;
- demonstrations of smart farming technologies.

These tools transform farm visits into engaging educational experiences while encouraging discussion and curiosity.

Preserving Rural Knowledge and Cultural Heritage
Digital storytelling allows agro-tourism businesses to preserve and share local traditions, farming knowledge and regional history with future generations.
Videos, photographs, podcasts and interactive learning materials help communicate authentic rural culture while strengthening community identity.

Economic Sustainability
Long-term economic sustainability depends on maintaining competitive, resilient and innovative rural businesses.
Smart technologies can support these goals by improving communication, reducing administrative effort and creating new opportunities for visitor engagement.

Increasing Competitiveness
Visitors increasingly expect reliable online information, digital booking options and easy communication.
Businesses that provide these services are more likely to attract new visitors, encourage repeat visits and strengthen their reputation.

Improving Business Efficiency
Digital tools can reduce routine administrative work, allowing operators to focus more on visitor experiences.
Examples include:

- automated booking confirmations;
- online visitor information;
- digital feedback collection;
- electronic event promotion.

These solutions improve operational efficiency while reducing time spent on repetitive tasks.

Supporting Rural Development
Successful agro-tourism businesses contribute to rural economies by:

- creating employment opportunities;
- promoting regional products;
- supporting local suppliers;
- attracting visitors to rural areas.

Digital technologies strengthen these contributions by increasing visibility and improving cooperation between local stakeholders.

Community Resilience and Local Value Chains
Smart technologies can also strengthen cooperation within rural communities.
Examples include:

- digital promotion of regional products;
- interactive maps featuring local attractions;
- cooperation between farms, accommodation providers and tourism organisations;
- shared online marketing initiatives.

These activities help create stronger local value chains and contribute to more resilient rural economies.

Practical Example
A small agro-tourism business replaces printed visitor leaflets with QR-code information stations that provide information about biodiversity, regional food products and sustainable farming practices.
The business also introduces a weather station display and demonstrates how soil moisture sensors help optimise irrigation.
As a result:

- fewer printed materials are required;
- visitors access more detailed and regularly updated information;
- awareness of sustainable farming practices increases;
- regional products receive greater visibility;
- visitors gain a better understanding of how digital technologies support environmental sustainability.

Key Message
Smart technologies are not simply tools for digitalisation—they are practical instruments that can support more sustainable, resilient and visitor-oriented agro-tourism businesses.
When combined with responsible management, authentic hospitality and sustainable farming practices, digital solutions contribute to environmental protection, social inclusion, economic resilience and the long-term development of rural communities.
Technology should therefore be viewed as an enabler of sustainable development rather than an end in itself.

Reflection Question
Which sustainability challenge facing agro-tourism businesses in your region could be addressed most effectively through the thoughtful use of smart technologies? Explain your reasoning and provide one practical example.

9. KEY TAKEAWAYS

Smart technologies offer practical opportunities for agro-tourism businesses to improve visitor experiences, strengthen business performance and support sustainable rural development. Successful digitalisation does not require large investments or advanced technical expertise. Instead, carefully selected, user-friendly technologies can deliver significant benefits for both visitors and businesses.
The following recommendations summarise the key messages of this module:

1. Make Your Business Easy to Find Online
For many visitors, the first contact with an agro-tourism business takes place online. Maintaining an up-to-date Google Business Profile with accurate contact details, opening hours, photographs and visitor information is one of the most effective ways to improve visibility and attract new visitors.

2. Focus on the Complete Visitor Journey
Digital technologies should support visitors before, during and after their visit. Consider how online information, digital communication and interactive learning tools can improve accessibility, engagement and overall visitor satisfaction at every stage of the journey.

3. Start with Practical and Affordable Solutions
Digital transformation does not require expensive technology. Simple solutions such as QR-code learning trails, visitor feedback surveys, online booking systems or digital visitor maps can provide immediate benefits while creating a foundation for future innovation.

4. Use Smart Farming Technologies as Learning Opportunities
Modern agricultural technologies—including GPS-guided machinery, weather stations, soil sensors and drone applications—can enrich visitor experiences by demonstrating how innovation supports sustainable farming.
Integrating these technologies into guided tours and educational activities helps visitors better understand modern agriculture and increases the educational value of agro-tourism.

5. Combine Technology with Personal Hospitality
Technology should enhance—not replace—the authentic hospitality, local knowledge and personal interaction that make agro-tourism unique.
The most successful businesses combine digital innovation with genuine human experiences.

6. Continuously Evaluate and Improve
Digital technologies should be reviewed and updated regularly.
Visitor feedback, online reviews and usage data provide valuable information that helps businesses improve services, respond to visitor needs and remain competitive.
Continuous improvement is an essential part of successful digitalisation.

Immediate Action for Learners

Identify one practical digital improvement that could realistically be implemented within the next three months in an agro-tourism business, educational institution or rural tourism project.

Briefly describe:

- the technology you would introduce;
- the visitor need it addresses;
- the expected benefits;
- how it contributes to sustainability.

Final Reflection

What is the single most important lesson you have learned from this module, and how could you apply it in your future professional practice?

10. ASSESSMENT

Smart Agro-Tourism Technology Improvement Plan
Assessment Purpose
The purpose of this assessment is to evaluate learners' ability to apply the knowledge, concepts and practical examples presented throughout this module in a realistic agro-tourism context.
Rather than testing theoretical knowledge alone, learners are expected to demonstrate practical competences by analysing an existing situation, selecting appropriate smart technologies and developing a realistic implementation plan.
The assessment reflects the key findings of the VETourismo WP2 research by promoting digital competences, practical problem-solving skills and sustainable innovation within agro-tourism businesses.

Assessment Task
Learners are required to prepare a Smart Agro-Tourism Technology Improvement Plan for either:

- a real agro-tourism business;
- a fictional agro-tourism business;
- their own organisation (where applicable).

The selected business may include:

- a farm offering visitor experiences;
- a rural accommodation provider;
- an educational farm;
- a local food tourism business;
- a community-based agro-tourism initiative.

Required Components
1. Business Description
Provide a brief overview of the selected business, including:

- main activities;
- target visitor groups;
- existing services;
- current digital presence.

2. Visitor Journey Analysis
Analyse the visitor experience at the following stages:

- before the visit;
- during the visit;
- after the visit.

Identify both strengths and opportunities for improvement.

3. Smart Technology Recommendations
Recommend at least three smart technologies that would improve visitor experiences.
Examples include:

- Google Business Profile;
- QR-code learning trails;
- online booking systems;
- digital visitor feedback tools;
- virtual tours;
- smart farming demonstrations;
- weather stations;
- GPS-guided machinery;
- drone applications.

For each technology explain:

- why it was selected;
- visitor benefits;
- implementation requirements;
- expected sustainability contribution.

4. Implementation Plan
Prepare a practical implementation plan including:

- priorities;
- timeline;
- required resources;
- estimated costs;
- possible risks;
- expected outcomes.

5. Sustainability Considerations
Explain how your proposed improvements contribute to:

- environmental sustainability;
- social sustainability;
- economic sustainability.

6. Reflection
Conclude your report by answering the following questions:

- Which recommendation would have the greatest positive impact?
- Which recommendation would be easiest to implement?
- What challenges might occur during implementation?
- How could these challenges be addressed?

Submission Formats
Learners may submit their work in one of the following formats:

- Written report
- Presentation (PowerPoint or similar)
- Academic poster
- Short video presentation (approximately 5–7 minutes)

All submission formats are assessed using the same learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

Assessment Criteria
Criterion
Weight
Visitor Journey Analysis
20%
Selection and Justification of Smart Technologies
25%
Practical Feasibility
20%
Sustainability Integration
15%
Quality of Implementation Plan
10%
Communication and Presentation
10%

Performance Levels
Excellent (90–100%)
The improvement plan demonstrates excellent understanding of agro-tourism and smart technologies.
Recommendations are realistic, innovative and clearly justified.
Strong links are made to sustainability and visitor experience.
The presentation is professional, well-structured and convincing.

Good (75–89%)
The improvement plan addresses the main challenges appropriately.
Most recommendations are practical and well explained.
The sustainability dimension is clearly considered.
Only minor improvements are required.

Satisfactory (60–74%)
The learner demonstrates a basic understanding of smart technologies.
Some recommendations lack detail or justification.
The implementation plan is feasible but requires further development.

Needs Improvement (Below 60%)
The submission demonstrates limited understanding of the module content.
Recommendations are unrealistic, incomplete or insufficiently justified.
Important elements of the assessment are missing.

Assessment Guidance for Different Submission Formats
Written Report
Assessment focuses on the quality of analysis, logical structure, practical recommendations and use of evidence.

Presentation
Assessment focuses on clear communication, logical organisation, visual quality and the learner's ability to justify proposed solutions.

Poster
Assessment focuses on visual clarity, concise presentation of key ideas and effective communication of recommendations.

Video Presentation
Assessment focuses on content quality, verbal explanation, visual communication and the learner's ability to present realistic and convincing recommendations.

Trainer Notes
When assessing learner submissions, trainers should focus on the practical application of knowledge rather than technical perfection.
Learners should be encouraged to propose realistic solutions that are appropriate for the size, budget and objectives of the selected agro-tourism business.
Constructive feedback should highlight:
feasibility of recommendations;
visitor-centred thinking;
sustainability considerations;
creativity;
practical implementation.

The assessment is intended to encourage reflective thinking and support learners in transferring theoretical knowledge into authentic professional practice.

Self-Assessment
Before submitting your work, ask yourself:
✔️ Have I analysed the complete visitor journey?
✔️ Have I recommended at least three appropriate smart technologies?
✔️ Have I explained how my recommendations improve visitor experiences?
✔️ Have I considered environmental, social and economic sustainability?
✔️ Is my implementation plan realistic and achievable?
✔️ Have I justified my recommendations clearly?

Final Reflection
How has your understanding of smart technologies in agro-tourism changed through this module, and which digital innovation would you most like to implement in practice?

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Digital Tools Referenced in this Module
The following digital tools are referenced for educational and demonstration purposes:

- Google Business Profile
- Google Forms
- Canva
- ThingLink
- QR Code Generator
- Google Maps
- Online Booking Platforms (generic category)

The inclusion of these tools does not constitute endorsement. Trainers and learners should evaluate suitability based on local needs and circumstances.
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VETourismo

MODULE 2.2

SMART TECHNOLOGIES FOR AGRO-TOURISM

VETourismo

ADVANCING DIGITAL AND SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN AGRO-TOURISM FOR VETS

Project Number: 2025-1-DE02-KA220-VET-000361332

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VETourismo

MODULE 3.1

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

VETourismo

ADVANCING DIGITAL AND SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN AGRO-TOURISM FOR VETS

Project Number: 2025-1-DE02-KA220-VET-000361332

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1. INTRODUCTION

Agro-tourism represents a vital opportunity for rural development, but success requires more than just offering accommodation or farm products — it requires a solid entrepreneurial mindset. This module introduces the fundamental business skills needed to start, manage, and grow an agro-tourism enterprise in a rural context.

Many operators struggle not with the quality of their offerings, but with business planning, financial management, and market positioning. By developing these competences, VET learners and rural entrepreneurs can transform authentic local experiences into financially viable and resilient businesses that benefit both their families and the wider rural community.

This module is designed for people who are already engaged in, or considering entering, the agro-tourism sector. No prior business training is required. All concepts are explained through practical examples drawn from real rural businesses across Europe.
Practical Example: A small family farm in rural Italy produces organic cheese and olive oil. They have excellent products and a beautiful location, but they are struggling financially. The problem is not their product — it is their business model. They have no pricing strategy, no understanding of their break-even point, and no plan for the winter months when visitors stop coming. Entrepreneurship skills can transform this situation.

2. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Apply appropriate business models to rural agro-tourism contexts, selecting the model that best fits their resources and market.
2. Develop a structured business plan, identifying the key components and avoiding the most common mistakes made by small rural operators.
3. Analyse basic financial metrics, including fixed and variable costs, pricing strategies, break-even points, and 12-month cash flow projections.
4. Design revenue diversification strategies to reduce dependence on seasonal income and build business resilience.
5. Identify relevant EU funding opportunities (particularly EAFRD and LEADER/CLLD programmes) and understand the basic legal requirements for operating an agro-tourism business in Europe.

WP2 Findings Addressed by this Module:
- Weak entrepreneurial and customer service competences: Learners develop practical business planning and financial management skills.
- Limited practical learning and work-based exposure: All activities are grounded in real agro-tourism scenarios and operational tasks.
- Weak cooperation between VET providers and businesses: The module encourages learners to identify and build partnerships with local producers, cooperatives, and public bodies.

Reflection Question: Before starting this module, think about a rural business you know — a farm shop, a B&B, a local food producer. What do you think are the three biggest challenges they face in running their business? Keep your answers in mind as you work through the module.

3. PRACTICAL BACKGROUND

Entrepreneurship in agro-tourism differs significantly from traditional business. It operates at the intersection of agriculture, hospitality, and rural community life. Understanding this context is essential before applying any business tool.

Key Concepts:
The Agro-Tourism Business Model
Unlike a standard hotel or restaurant, an agro-tourism business uses the farm itself as the product. The land, the animals, the seasonal rhythms, and the traditional knowledge of the farmer are all assets. The business model must reflect this by building the visitor experience around authentic agricultural activities.

Value Proposition
The most powerful competitive advantage of agro-tourism is authenticity. Visitors are not simply looking for accommodation — they are seeking an experience they cannot find in a city. This means the value proposition must be clearly communicated: what makes this farm unique? What can a visitor do, learn, taste, or experience here that they cannot find anywhere else?

Seasonality Management
Rural tourism is highly seasonal. Most agro-tourism businesses generate 70–80% of their annual revenue in 3–4 months. This creates a critical challenge: how to manage cash flow during the off-peak months. Effective financial management must account for this reality from the outset.

The Regulatory Environment
Operating a business that involves food production, accommodation, and public access requires navigating complex health, safety, and zoning regulations. In Italy, for example, agritourism businesses are regulated by national law (Law 96/2006) and regional legislation. Similar frameworks exist across all EU member states. Understanding the basic requirements — licensing, food safety, fire safety, insurance — is a non-negotiable first step.

Sector Trends
The agro-tourism sector is growing rapidly across Europe, driven by post-pandemic demand for outdoor, authentic, and sustainable travel experiences. Key trends include:
- Experiential tourism: Visitors pay for active participation (harvesting, cooking, cheese-making) rather than passive observation.
- Digital discovery: Over 70% of rural tourism bookings now begin with an online search. Visibility on Google and booking platforms is essential.
- Sustainability as a selling point: Eco-certified farms and organic producers can command premium prices.

Key Concept — Break-Even Point: The break-even point is the moment when total revenues equal total costs. Below this point, the business is losing money. Above it, the business is profitable. Knowing your break-even point before setting prices is one of the most important steps in business planning.

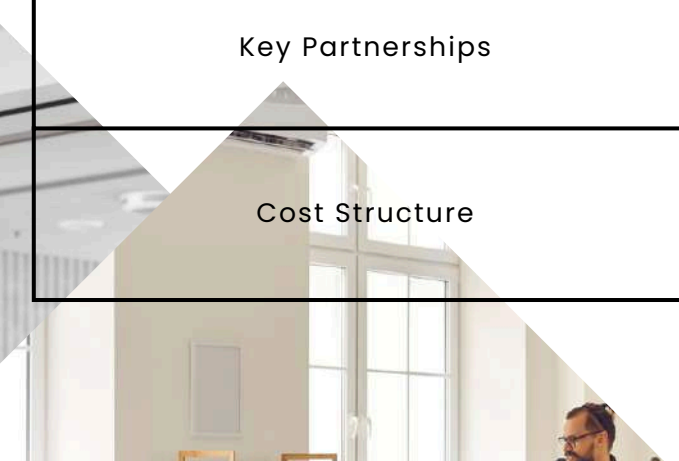
Example: If a farm's fixed costs are €2,000/month and each visitor generates €50 in profit, the farm needs at least 40 visitors per month to break even. If the farm is only open 4 months a year, it needs 160 visitors in total — before it makes a single euro of profit.

4. PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Step 1: Understanding Business Models for Agro-Tourism

The Business Model Canvas (BMC) is the most practical tool for mapping how a business creates, delivers, and captures value. It has 9 building blocks:

Block	Question to answer
Customer Segments	Who are your visitors? (families, couples, school groups, corporate)
Value Proposition	What unique experience do you offer?
Channels	How do visitors find and book you? (website, Airbnb, word of mouth)
Customer Relationships	How do you interact with guests before, during and after their visit?
Revenue Streams	How do you earn money? (accommodation, experiences, products, workshops)
Key Resources	What do you need to deliver the experience? (land, equipment, knowledge)
Key Activities	What do you do every day to run the business?
Key Partnerships	Who helps you? (local producers, tourism boards, transport providers)
Cost Structure	What are your main fixed and variable costs?



Step 2: Building a Business Plan — The Essentials

A practical business plan for a small agro-tourism operator does not need to be a 50-page document. It should clearly answer four questions:
1. What are we offering? (The product/experience)
2. Who are our customers? (The market)
3. How will we operate? (The logistics)
4. Will it be financially viable? (The numbers)

Step 3: Financial Management Basics

Cost Analysis:
- Fixed Costs: Costs that do not change with the number of visitors (e.g., insurance, mortgage/rent, utilities, maintenance). These must be paid even if no one visits.
- Variable Costs: Costs that increase with the number of visitors (e.g., food for meals, cleaning supplies, welcome gifts). These can be controlled.

Pricing Strategy:
Many rural operators make the mistake of pricing based on what competitors charge, without checking whether that price covers their own costs. The correct approach is:
1. Calculate your total costs (fixed + variable per visitor).
2. Add your desired profit margin.
3. Check whether the resulting price is competitive and perceived as fair value.

Cash Flow Forecasting:
Create a 12-month projection mapping expected income against expenses. This will reveal the months when the business will have a cash shortfall — allowing you to plan in advance (e.g., by securing a short-term credit line or pre-selling winter workshops).

Step 4: Revenue Diversification Strategies

To combat seasonality, agro-tourism operators can:
- Sell farm products online year-round (jams, olive oil, wine, cheese, honey).
- Host corporate retreats or team-building events during off-peak weekdays.
- Offer pre-booking discounts for the following season (paid in advance).
- Develop educational programmes for school groups in spring and autumn.
- Create subscription boxes with seasonal farm products.

Step 5: Accessing EU Funding

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) is the main EU funding instrument for rural businesses. Key access points:
- LEADER/CLLD programmes: Managed by Local Action Groups (LAGs), these provide grants for rural diversification, including agro-tourism development.
- Measure 6.4: Specifically supports investment in non-agricultural activities on farms.
- How to apply: Contact your national/regional Rural Development Programme authority or your local LAG office.

Practical Tool — Cash Flow Template
This interactive Cash Flow Forecast template helps you map monthly income and expenditure across two full business years, automatically calculating your monthly surplus or deficit and running closing balance. It highlights the critical need to build reserves during peak trading months (e.g. June–September) to cover the inevitable deficit periods (e.g. January–March, November–December). All figures are entered in Euro (€) and update in real time, giving you an instant picture of your business's liquidity at any point in the year. Once complete, the full plan can be exported as a PDF or Excel file for sharing with advisors, lenders, or investors.

https://finance.innovaturismo.it/



5. CASE STUDY

Case Study: La Fattoria Verde — From Struggling Farm to Profitable Agro-Tourism Business

Context:
La Fattoria Verde is a family-run olive farm in rural Umbria, Italy. The farm has been in the family for three generations and produces high-quality extra virgin olive oil and traditional preserves. The farm is beautiful, set among ancient olive groves with a restored farmhouse. However, agricultural income alone is no longer sufficient to sustain the family.

Challenge:
The owners decide to open two guest rooms and offer olive oil tasting experiences to visitors. They set their prices based on what neighbouring traditional B&Bs charge (€60/night), without considering the additional costs of hosting tasting sessions or the time taken away from farming. They also have no system for managing bookings and rely entirely on word of mouth.

By the end of the first tourist season, they are exhausted and have barely broken even. They have hosted 120 guests but have not made a profit. They are considering abandoning the agro-tourism venture.

Action:
The owners attend a VET course on entrepreneurship. Using the Business Model Canvas, they discover that their real Value Proposition is not simply a bed for the night — it is an immersive agricultural experience that urban visitors cannot find anywhere else. They restructure their offering into 'Experience Packages':
- The Harvest Weekend (€180/person, 2 nights + guided olive harvest + tasting + farm dinner)
- The Slow Olive Experience (€90/person, 1 night + tasting workshop + product gift box)

They also identify two Key Partnerships they had overlooked: a local hiking guide who can bring groups to the farm, and a regional food tourism platform that lists authentic farm experiences.

Result:
In the second season, they host fewer guests (80 instead of 120) but generate 40% more revenue. Their profit margin increases significantly, and they have more time to manage the farm. They also begin selling their olive oil online year-round, creating a revenue stream that partially offsets the winter cash shortfall.

Reflection Question for Learners:

If you were the owner of La Fattoria Verde, what additional revenue stream could you develop during the winter months (December–February) when there is no olive harvest and very few visitors?

Consider:
- What resources does the farm already have?
- What skills does the family possess?
- What do urban visitors look for in winter?

Write down your idea and estimate how much revenue it could generate per month.

6. INTERACTIVE EXERCISE

Exercise Title: Build Your Agro-Tourism Business Model Canvas
Learning Goal:
Apply the Business Model Canvas to a realistic agro-tourism scenario, identifying viable revenue streams, customer segments, and key partnerships.

Instructions:
1. Divide learners into small groups of 3–4 people.
2. Provide each group with a blank Business Model Canvas template (printed A3 or digital via Miro/Canva).
3. Assign each group one of the following fictional rural assets:
- Option A: An abandoned stone barn on a working vineyard in rural Bulgaria, 2 km from a hiking trail.
- Option B: A traditional farmhouse in rural Romania with a large vegetable garden and a small flock of sheep.
- Option C: A small dairy farm in northern Italy that produces artisan cheese, located near a lake.
4. Each group must design a new agro-tourism service for their assigned asset.
5. They must complete all 9 blocks of the Business Model Canvas, with particular attention to:
- Value Proposition: What makes this experience unique?
- Revenue Streams: How will the business earn money? (List at least 3 streams)
- Key Partnerships: Who could help this business succeed? (Name at least 3 real or realistic partners)
- Cost Structure: What are the main fixed and variable costs?

Expected Output:
A completed Business Model Canvas, either on paper or digital format.

Presentation:
Each group delivers a 5-minute 'investor pitch' presenting their business model to the class. The pitch must include:
- The name and concept of the agro-tourism business
- The target customer segment
- The main revenue streams and estimated pricing
- The three most important partnerships

Assessment Method:
Trainer and peers evaluate each pitch using a simple rubric assessing: financial realism, creativity of the value proposition, and quality of the partnership strategy.

Duration: 90 minutes total
- 45 minutes: Group work on the Business Model Canvas
- 30 minutes: Group presentations (5 minutes each)
- 15 minutes: Trainer feedback and class discussion

Materials Needed:
- Blank Business Model Canvas templates (1 per group)
- Post-it notes and markers (for physical version)
- OR: Access to Miro, Canva, or Strategyzer (for digital version)
- Fictional asset description cards (1 per group)

Trainer Note: Encourage groups to think about the winter months specifically. A business model that only works in summer is not financially sustainable.

7. DIGITAL TOOL

Digital Tool: Business Model Canvas via Strategyzer (Online)

Tool Name: Strategyzer Business Model Canvas
Access: https://www.strategyzer.com/canvas/business-model-canvas (free account available)
Alternative: Miro (miro.com) or Canva (canva.com) — both offer free BMC templates

Purpose:
The Business Model Canvas is a visual strategic management tool that allows entrepreneurs to describe, design, challenge, and pivot their business model. It is particularly useful for agro-tourism operators because it forces them to think about how all parts of their business connect, rather than focusing only on the product.

Step-by-Step Guide for a Rural Agro-Tourism Operator:

Step 1: Create a free account on Strategyzer or open a new board on Miro.
Step 2: Start with the Customer Segments block. Ask: Who are my visitors? (e.g., urban families with children, couples seeking romantic escapes, school groups, corporate teams)
Step 3: Move to the Value Proposition block. Ask: What do I offer that is unique? (e.g., hands-on olive harvesting, traditional cheese-making workshop, farm-to-table dinner with the family)
Step 4: Fill in the Channels block. Ask: How do visitors find and book me? (e.g., own website, Airbnb, local tourism board, Instagram)
Step 5: Complete the Revenue Streams block. List every way the business can earn money (accommodation, experiences, product sales, workshops, subscriptions).
Step 6: Fill in the remaining blocks (Key Resources, Key Activities, Key Partnerships, Cost Structure).
Step 7: Review the completed canvas. Ask: Are the Revenue Streams sufficient to cover the Cost Structure?

Benefits for Rural Operators:
- Visual and intuitive — no business training required
- Easy to update as the business evolves
- Much less intimidating than a traditional 30-page business plan
- Can be completed in a 2-hour workshop

Limitations:
- The BMC is a planning tool, not a financial model. It must be complemented with a basic cash flow spreadsheet.
- It does not account for regulatory requirements or funding applications.

Complementary Tool — Simple Financial Planning Template:
Download a free Google Sheets cash flow template (search: 'small business cash flow template Google Sheets') and adapt it to your agro-tourism business. Input your projected monthly income and costs to identify cash shortfall months in advance.

Practical Example:

Maria runs a small farm in rural Croatia. She has been offering accommodation for 3 years but is not making a profit. She uses the Business Model Canvas for the first time at a VET workshop.

When she fills in the Revenue Streams block, she realises she has only one revenue stream: accommodation. When she fills in the Key Resources block, she realises she has assets she is not using: a large kitchen, a herb garden, and traditional family recipes.

Within one week, she designs two new revenue streams:
1. A 'Croatian Farm Cooking' half-day workshop (€45/person)
2. A 'Herb & Honey' product box sold online (€25/box)

By the end of the following season, these two new streams represent 30% of her total revenue.

8. SUSTAINABILITY LINK

Economic Sustainability — The Foundation of Everything Else
True sustainability has three pillars: environmental, social, and economic. This module focuses primarily on the economic pillar, which is often overlooked in sustainability discussions but is in fact the foundation that makes the other two possible.

A financially struggling farm cannot afford to invest in solar panels, organic certification, or biodiversity conservation measures. Economic viability is the precondition for environmental and social sustainability.

Economic Sustainability in Practice:
- Correct pricing ensures that the business generates enough income to cover costs, pay fair wages, and invest in improvements.
- Cash flow management prevents the business from collapsing during off-peak months, ensuring long-term continuity.
- Revenue diversification reduces dependence on a single income source, making the business more resilient to external shocks (bad weather, pandemics, market changes).
- Access to EU funding allows operators to invest in sustainable infrastructure (energy efficiency, water management, organic transition) without depleting their working capital.

Social Sustainability:
By developing strong entrepreneurial skills, rural businesses can:
- Create local employment, particularly for young people who might otherwise leave rural areas.
- Prevent rural depopulation by making it economically viable to stay and work in rural communities.
- Keep traditional farming practices, food cultures, and local knowledge alive by making them economically valuable.
- Act as anchors for the local economy, purchasing from other local producers and recommending local services.

Connection to the European Green Deal:
The European Green Deal's Farm to Fork Strategy and the EU Biodiversity Strategy both recognise that economically viable farms are essential partners in the transition to sustainable food systems. The EAFRD specifically funds agro-tourism development as a tool for rural economic diversification and sustainability.

Practical Sustainability Recommendation:
When developing your Business Model Canvas, include at least one sustainability-oriented revenue stream (e.g., eco-certified accommodation, organic product sales, educational programmes about sustainable farming). This not only contributes to sustainability goals but also differentiates your offering in an increasingly competitive market.

Sustainability in Numbers:

According to the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD), agro-tourism businesses that diversify their income streams are:
- 3x more likely to survive beyond 5 years than single-activity farms
- More likely to employ local staff year-round rather than seasonally
- More likely to invest in environmental improvements (organic certification, energy efficiency)

The connection is clear: economic resilience enables environmental and social sustainability.

9. KEY TAKEAWAYS

Key Takeaways from Module 3.1 — Entrepreneurship

1. Price for Value, Not Just Cost
Rural agro-tourism experiences have a unique value that goes far beyond the cost of materials. Price your offerings based on the authentic, irreplaceable experience you provide — not on what the nearest B&B charges.

2. Plan for Seasonality from Day One
Cash flow management is the single most important financial skill for agro-tourism operators. Map your income and expenses month by month before you open, and identify the months when you will need reserves.

3. The Business Model Canvas is Your Best Friend
Use the BMC as a living document. Review and update it at the end of every tourist season. It will help you spot opportunities you are missing and risks you are ignoring.

4. Diversify Your Income Streams
Do not rely on a single revenue stream. Combine accommodation, experiences, product sales, and workshops to build a resilient business that generates income year-round.

5. Know Your Numbers
Understand your break-even point. Know your fixed costs and your variable costs. These are not abstract financial concepts — they are the difference between a profitable business and one that fails.

Operational Recommendations for Immediate Application:
- This week: Calculate your break-even point for the current season.
- This month: Complete a Business Model Canvas for your business and identify one new revenue stream you could add.
- This year: Research your local LEADER/LAG group and identify one funding opportunity relevant to your business.
Remember: The goal of entrepreneurship in agro-tourism is not just profit — it is building a business that is financially viable, personally fulfilling, and a genuine asset to the rural community. A well-run agro-tourism business creates value for the farmer, the visitor, and the village.

10. ASSESSMENT

Assessment: The Agro-Tourism Business Rescue Challenge

Assessment Type: Practical Scenario Analysis

Scenario:
You are a business advisor. A rural family has contacted you for help. They run a small agro-tourism business in a mountainous region: a farmhouse with 3 guest rooms, a vegetable garden, and a small flock of goats. They produce artisan goat cheese.

They have been operating for 2 years. They have many positive reviews online, but they are not making a profit. Their current situation:
- They charge €55/night per room (3 rooms)
- They are open from May to September (5 months)
- Their fixed monthly costs are €1,800 (insurance, utilities, maintenance, loan repayment)
- Their variable costs are approximately €20 per guest per night (food, cleaning, welcome pack)
- Last season they had an average occupancy of 60% (roughly 270 guest nights)

Your Task:
1. Financial Analysis (25 points): Calculate their total revenue, total costs, and net profit/loss for last season. Identify the main financial problem.

2. Pricing Strategy (25 points): Propose a revised pricing strategy. Show your calculations and explain your reasoning. Consider whether they should change their price, their occupancy target, or both.

3. Revenue Diversification (25 points): Propose two new revenue streams that this farm could realistically add within the next 12 months. For each stream, estimate the potential monthly revenue and the additional costs involved.

4. Partnership Strategy (25 points): Identify two specific local partnerships that could help this business grow without requiring significant capital investment. Explain what each partner would provide and what the farm would offer in return.

Submission Format: Written report (maximum 2 pages) or oral presentation (10 minutes).

Evaluation Criteria:
- Accuracy of financial calculations
- Realism and practicality of proposed solutions
- Evidence of understanding of agro-tourism context
- Quality of reasoning and argumentation

Assessment Note for Trainers:

This assessment directly addresses the WP2 finding of 'Weak entrepreneurial and customer service competences' by requiring learners to apply financial analysis and strategic thinking to a realistic rural business scenario.

The correct answer to the financial analysis (Task 1):
- Total Revenue: 270 nights × €55 = €14,850
- Fixed Costs: €1,800 × 5 months = €9,000
- Variable Costs: 270 nights × €20 = €5,400
- Total Costs: €14,400
- Net Profit: €450 (barely profitable — the problem is clear)

A learner who identifies that the business needs either higher prices, higher occupancy, or additional revenue streams — and can justify their recommendation with numbers — has demonstrated the core competence of this module.

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VETourismo

MODULE 3.1

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

VETourismo

ADVANCING DIGITAL AND SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN AGRO-TOURISM FOR VETS

Project Number: 2025-1-DE02-KA220-VET-000361332

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VETourismo

MODULE 3.2

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT & CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

VETourismo

ADVANCING DIGITAL AND SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN AGRO-TOURISM FOR VETS

Project Number: 2025-1-DE02-KA220-VET-000361332

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1. INTRODUCTION

A cozy room and a parting gift are no longer enough for today's travelers. They want to live the lifestyle, engage in daily farm operations, and connect with the heritage of the land. For agritourism to succeed today, it must combine authentic hospitality, immersive activities, and simple digital tools.

The Shift from "Bed & Breakfast" to "Experiences"
In the past, rural tourism was simple: you offered a room and sold some raw vegetables. Today, to survive in a highly competitive European market, farmers must design memorable customer experiences (CX).

If a tourist can get a standard hotel room anywhere, they will only choose a farm if it offers something unique—like cheese-making workshops, wine tastings, or truffle hunting.The Illusion of Safety: Europe's Digital Blindspot

The Rural Snapshot
Thousands of rural accommodations worldwide remain practically invisible to the modern market. While they may exist in reality, over 70% lack a functional online footprint, relying almost entirely on word-of-mouth or basic, unoptimized social media pages. They operate without direct booking features, real-time availability calendars, or structured reservation systems.

The Global Reality:
This "digital paradox" is a widespread challenge. Countless authentic homestays and farm stays are technically "online" via social media, but they lack the essential digital infrastructure required to secure a business transaction.

The Social Media Trap:
Maintaining a social media presence is not the same as being digitally operational. When an international traveler wants to book a weekend getaway at a remote farm stay but is forced to send a direct message in a foreign language and wait days for a response, they quickly lose patience and opt for a standard, mainstream hotel instead.

Why This Weakens Local Economies:
Without independent booking systems or synchronized calendars, small-scale rural operators are left with two unfavorable options:

- Remain completely invisible to the global travel market;
- Rely entirely on major online travel agencies (OTAs), which claim a massive share of their hard-earned revenue through high commission fees.

To bridge this gap, rural entrepreneurs do not need to become technology experts. Instead, they require intuitive, localized booking software that empowers them to manage their own calendars, process payments, and own their customer relationships. Only then can the agritourism sector ensure that its financial benefits remain exactly where they belong: within the local communities.

"Practical Scenario: Imagine a traditional family farm in the Central Balkan mountain range producing elite organic sheep cheese and wild herbal honey. The family welcomes visitors, but all reservation matching occurs via sporadic cell-phone calls or unmonitored messaging threads. Because their booking calendar is purely paper-based, they regularly suffer from double-bookings, or lose premium international clients due to language barriers and delayed administrative responses. Furthermore, global travelers cannot locate the farm on Google Maps or find verified digital reviews. Question: How can the step-by-step introduction of free digital localization and data-gathering tools transform the commercial viability of this rural micro-enterprise, without stripping away its precious, authentic rural soul? Explained in the Learning Objectives."

2. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By completing this training section, learners will build tangible operational capabilities that directly close the specific capacity gaps identified in the WP2 field research of the VETourismo project:

- Establishing and Managing Digital Identity: Learners will independently set up, optimize, and supervise their localized business footprint on global map networks. (Localization of Tourism Objects in Google Maps.);
- Designing Customer Experiences: Learners will acquire the skills to get to know with (raw farm activities like fruit harvesting, dough or sourdough baking) - adding heritage storytelling to the whole picture;
- Acquiring knowledge on other innovative digital tools: Learners will acquire new digital tools such as Google Business Profile, Webnode, Wix, Google forms and Typeform;
- Automated Customer Feedback: Learners will know how to build digital feedback forms and automatically ask guests for reviews after their stay to maintain a good online image.





3. PRACTICAL BACKGROUND

3.1. The Commercial Dilemma of EU Agro-Tourism

Agritourism is a powerful driver for revitalizing Europe's rural areas. The barrier to its success isn't the quality of the local products, food, or landscapes—which are exceptional—but rather a digital divide. Smallholders and farmers often lack the necessary marketing skills and digital tools to promote and sell their experiences online.

Here are the three main things holding them back:
The Financial Toll of Third-Party Booking: Lacking the marketing capital and technical know-how to build their own digital presence, small family farms are left with no choice but to rely on major booking intermediaries like Booking.com or Airbnb. These global platforms demand a massive premium, taking a 15% to 22% cut out of every reservation. For a small family-run operation, these high commission fees directly drain their primary source of livelihood.

The "Peak Season" Trap: Rural tourism is incredibly seasonal. Places are packed during holidays or summer, but completely empty the rest of the year. Most owners don't have the tools or know-how to change their prices dynamically (like raising rates when demand is high or offering special packages when it's slow). Out of desperation, they often slash prices way too low just to get some cash flowing.The Digital Gap: Even though the European Union provides plenty of funding to help rural areas go digital, the money and tech rarely reach the actual farmers. For an everyday farmer, learning how to build a direct-booking website or use complex digital tools is just too difficult without proper training.

The solution

To survive, farmers need to stop relying blindly on global booking giants. Instead, they need to:
Team up in local co-ops and networks;
Learn how to manage their prices smarter throughout the year;
Use EU funds to build their own direct-booking tools, so the money from tourists goes straight into their pockets instead of paying for heavy corporate commissions.

3.2. Customer Experience (CX) vs. Basic Hospitality Services

In slow tourism and agro-tourism, guests do not just buy a bed for the night or a simple meal. They are buying good emotions, learning new things, and escaping the stress of the city. Basic service is just about checking the guest in and taking their money. On the other hand, Customer Experience (CX) means caring about the guest's whole journey. It starts when they search for you on the internet, continues when you talk to them online, goes through their physical visit to the farm, and lasts long after they go home.

A great customer experience naturally leads to trust, which is the foundation for convincing guests to book directly with you rather than through third-party platforms. When guests feel valued throughout their journey, they are more likely to use your own booking system — which brings us to the financial benefits of this direct relationship.

3.3. Financial Benefits of Direct Digital Bookings

Relying heavily on Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) like “Booking.com” or “Airbnb” means giving away a significant portion of your hard-earned money. These platforms typically charge a commission of 15% to 22% for every reservation.

“To understand the real financial benefit of direct bookings, consider this simple example: when a guest books a room for €100 through an OTA, you may pay €18 in commission, leaving you with only €82. If that same guest books directly through your own website, you pay only a small credit card processing fee (usually around 1.5% to 3%), keeping approximately €97 instead.”

By encouraging direct digital bookings, you eliminate the middleman's high commission. This simple shift can boost your net profit by up to 20% per stay — giving you the extra cash needed to invest in your farm, improve guest experiences, or fund sustainable green upgrades.

But knowing the why is only the first step. The real question is: how do you actually make this shift happen? How do you transform your farm from a place where someone simply "books a room" into a destination where they come to live an experience — and choose to book that experience directly with you? The answer lies in how you present yourself in the digital world, starting from the very first moment a potential guest searches for you online.

4. PRACTICAL APPLICATION

4.1 From "I'm Booking a Hotel" to "I'm Living an Experience"

The journey of a modern agro-tourism guest begins long before they arrive at your gate. It starts with a search on Google, a photo seen on social media, or a recommendation from a friend. At that moment, your digital presence is your first handshake with the guest. If it communicates only a room and a price, you are competing with every hotel in the area. If it communicates a story, a landscape, a way of life — you are offering something that cannot be compared or replaced.
The following steps guide you through building that digital presence in a way that turns passive online visitors into engaged, loyal guests who book directly with you.

Step 1: Digital Footprint Optimization via Google Business Profile
Account Verification: Register the exact legal and commercial name of your property (e.g., "Name Organic Farm & Guesthouse"). This is the first thing a guest sees when they search for you — make sure it reflects the experience you offer, not just a generic accommodation name.

Manual Geo-Targeting: Manually place the map pin exactly over the physical entrance of the farm. Rural addresses frequently lack structured street data, making manual satellite pinning essential so that guests can navigate directly to you without frustration — because a difficult arrival is already a bad experience.
Media Curation: Upload high-quality photos that tell a story: the hands kneading bread at dawn, the vegetable garden at harvest time, the table set under the pergola. These images do not just show a place — they invite the guest into a life they want to experience, even before they arrive.
Operational Details: Keep your seasonal operating hours updated, ensure contact phone numbers are correct, and most importantly, include a direct link to your own booking system. Every guest who books through your website rather than through an OTA is a guest who has already chosen you — not just a room.

Step 2: Designing a Farm-to-Table Culinary Narrative
Food is one of the most powerful emotional triggers in travel. Research consistently shows that authentic local cuisine is among the top reasons why tourists choose agro-tourism over conventional hotels. But the difference between a meal that is simply eaten and a meal that is remembered — and shared online, and talked about at home — lies entirely in the story behind it.

This is where the farm-to-table culinary narrative becomes a direct tool for Customer Experience (CX). When a guest understands where their food comes from, who grew it, and how it was made, the act of eating is transformed. It is no longer a basic service (fuel for the body) but a meaningful moment (a connection to the land, the culture, and the people). That emotional connection is precisely what CX is designed to create — and it is what turns a one-time visitor into a loyal guest who returns and recommends.

Resource Auditing: Begin by taking stock of everything your farm produces directly on-site — sheep milk, wild herbs, free-range eggs, seasonal vegetables, homemade preserves. These are not just ingredients; they are the raw material of your story. A guest who knows that the yogurt on their breakfast table came from the sheep they saw grazing that morning has already had an experience that no city hotel can replicate.

Storytelling Integration: Remove generic menu titles and replace them with descriptions that reveal the origin and the human effort behind each dish. Instead of writing "Homemade Pastry", write: "Traditional Balkan Banitsa made with stone-ground flour from our village mill and organic eggs gathered from our free-range pasture this morning." This single sentence does three things for the customer experience: it builds trust (the guest knows exactly what they are eating), it creates emotional value (they feel connected to something authentic), and it justifies a premium price — because they are no longer paying for a pastry, they are paying for a story.

Interactive Value Add: The most memorable experiences are the ones where the guest is not a passive observer but an active participant. Invite guests into the process: design short morning workshops where visitors harvest their own wild herbs for breakfast tea, or witness artisanal cheese-making first-hand. When a guest has touched the dough, smelled the herbs, or stirred the milk themselves, the meal that follows is no longer just food — it is the conclusion of their own small adventure. This kind of participatory experience generates the highest levels of guest satisfaction, the most authentic social media content, and the strongest word-of-mouth recommendations — all of which feed directly back into your digital reputation and future bookings.

Step 3: Elaboration of Strategic Business Modernization Matrix

Operational Sphere	Practical Strategic Action	Target Tool / Scheme
1. Local Digital Marketing	Optimize local search engine positioning, map geolocations, and instant driving directions.	Google Business Profile
2. Owned Media Channel	Launch an independent web page displaying culinary tour availability and guesthouse details.	Webnode No-Code Builder
3. Customer Relationship Management	Automate customer data logging, track post-stay visitor communications, and segment promotional newsletters.	HubSpot CRM (Free Tier)
4. Customer Experience Metrics	Build interactive post-stay digital surveys to harvest customer feedback instantly.	Typeform Platform/Google Forms

5. CASE STUDY

Context: A family-owned rural enterprise with 15 active beds, backed by a micro-dairy producing sheep cheese and organic forest berry preserves. The property sits in a visually stunning mountain valley but historically suffered from low off-season occupancy.

Challenge: The owners relied entirely on landline /stationary/ phone bookings from older repeat domestic guests. They had zero international market reach, and heavy commission fees from online travel agents during peak holidays drained nearly 20% of their gross room turnover. The small staff lacked digital skills and struggled to collect feedback.

Action: The managers executed three strategic changes: (1) They claimed and verified their Google Business Profile, installing automated feedback triggers via custom QR codes. (2) They minimized reliance on high-fee intermediaries, routing booking traffic to a direct web form. (3) They gamified their dinner service into an interactive 'Culinary Journey' led by a local chef explaining the micro-history of each food ingredient.

Result: Within 12 months, the property's net revenues scaled by 28%. Off-season weekend occupancy doubled through specialized slow-food packages. The farm accumulated over 150 verified 5-star digital reviews, ranking them as the top local search result in their geographic district.

Discussion Link: Reflection Question: Which component of the modernization strategy yielded the highest structural return—the deployment of the digital tool itself, or the behavioral shift toward experience-driven culinary storytelling?

Trainer note – Case Study Answer: Introduction: The Synergy of Tech and Touch
The success of the modernization strategy lies not in choosing one component over the other, but in their operational synergy. However, when evaluating the highest structural return—meaning the change that fundamentally transformed the business model and secured long-term competitive advantage—the analysis must be split into two distinct layers: immediate financial efficiency versus strategic value creation.

1. The Argument for the Digital Tools (The Infrastructure)
From a purely quantitative and operational perspective, the deployment of the digital tools (Google Business Profile, direct web booking form, and automated QR feedback loops) provided the immediate structural baseline:
Direct Margin Recovery: Eliminating the intermediary commission immediately retained 15% to 22% of gross revenue within the enterprise. Mathematically, this is a pure structural return that directly optimizes cash flow without increasing prices.
Market Visibility and Access: The finest culinary experience in the Central Balkan region is commercially worthless if global travelers cannot locate it. The Scalability Engine: The automated QR code system transformed passive guest satisfaction into active digital capital (150 verified reviews). This triggered the Google algorithm to rank the farm as the top local search result, creating a self-sustaining loop of free, organic customer acquisition.

2. The Rationale for Storytelling (The Value)
From a strategic branding and long-term sustainability perspective, the behavioral shift toward slow-food culinary storytelling yielded the deepest qualitative transformation:
Overcoming Seasonality: Travelers do not travel to the mountains in the rainy off-season for a generic bed; they travel for an emotional and intellectual escape. The "Culinary Journey" transformed a basic overnight stay into a premium cultural event, which is the only reason off-season weekend occupancy doubled.
Premium Pricing Capability: A standard meal has a strict price ceiling. However, when that same meal is framed as an interactive cultural performance led by a local chef explaining micro-histories, it becomes a high-value experience. Consumers willingly pay a premium price for storytelling, shifting the farm away from price competition.

Preserving the "Rural Soul": The digital tool brought the guests to the gate, but the authentic storytelling is what converted them into brand ambassadors. It is the experience that motivated them to write the 5-star reviews in the first place.
Final Structural Verdict: Storytelling is the Fuel; Technology is the Pipeline!
The behavioral shift toward experience-driven storytelling yielded the highest long-term structural return, but it required the digital tool to unlock its commercial value.

The Analogy: The digital software tools represent a high-efficiency pipeline. They streamline administration, eliminate double-bookings, and stop profit leakage to foreign corporations. However, if the content flowing through that pipeline is a boring, unoptimized hospitality service, the pipeline will ultimately sit empty during the off-season.

The Core Value: The experience-driven culinary storytelling is the fuel. It defines the unique brand identity, creates emotional loyalty, and drives the premium pricing model.

Conclusion for Learners: True digital transformation in agro-tourism does not mean replacing human hospitality with technology. It means utilizing free digital tools to automate backend administration, thereby freeing up vital time for the rural entrepreneurs to do what they do best: act as passionate hosts, preserve local heritage, and deliver unforgettable, authentic human experiences.

6. INTERACTIVE EXERCISE

Exercise Title: Live Hospitality Simulation & Visitor Journey Mapping
Learning Objectives

- Develop practical customer service and communication skills.
- Master real-time visitor engagement.
- Map a multi-touchpoint visitor journey to identify operational problems.

Total Duration: 90 Minutes

Phase 1: The Welcome Role-Play (30 Minutes)
Format: Working in pairs. One learner acts as the Agro-Tourism Host (managing a traditional Balkan family farm). The other learner plays an International Visitor arriving after a difficult mountain drive.
The Task: The host must execute a warm, professional welcome. They need to share a short story about the farm's culinary heritage, handle the language barrier, and calm the visitor after their stressful trip.

Phase 2: Journey Mapping & Problem Solving (45 Minutes)
Format: Both learners work together using a structured matrix to trace the visitor's experience across 5 key steps:

1. Discovery: Finding the farm entrance using digital maps and GPS.
2. First Contact: Physical reception and the farm check-in process.
3. Core Experience: Participating in farm activities (e.g., artisanal cheese production).
4. Checkout: Smooth payment, offboarding, and departure.
5. Post-Stay Loyalty: Automated systems to collect digital feedback and reviews.

Phase 3: Service Improvement Plan (15 Minutes)
The Task: Each pair must document exactly two concrete solutions to fix the service problems they discovered during the role-play.
Examples of Deliverables:

1. Fixing Navigation: Rewrite the pre-arrival confirmation email to include a direct Google Maps pin.
2. Fixing Loyalty: Set up an automated HubSpot CRM email to send a thank-you discount code after checkout.

7. SUSTAINABILITY LINK

Tool 1: Google Business Profile (GBP)
A powerful local SEO and geo-targeting asset designed to display physical properties across Google Search and Google Maps ecosystem. Critical for ensuring high discoverability for agro-tourism properties located off major highways.

Step 1: Claim or Create Your Profile
Visit the Google Business Profile Manager and sign in using your business's Google account.
Search to see if your business already exists. If it does, click "Claim this business."
If it doesn't, select "Add your business to Google" to build a new profile from scratch.

Step 2: Add Your Core Details
Business Name: Use your exact, legal business name. Do not add extra keywords.
Business Category: Pick the most specific category that describes what your business actually does (e.g., "Italian Restaurant" instead of just "Restaurant").
Location & Service Area: If customers visit your storefront, add your physical address. If you only visit customers at their homes/offices, set up a service area (e.g., "Sofia").

Step 3: Complete the Profile Setup
Fill out the following fields to maximize your profile's effectiveness:
Operating Hours: Keep these strictly accurate, as updated holiday hours will boost customer trust.
Contact Info: Add your phone number and website URL.
Photos & Logo: Include high-quality photos of your storefront, products, and team to stand out.

Step 4: Verify Your Business
Google requires you to verify that you are the legitimate owner of the business. This is mandatory before your profile goes live. Verification methods usually include
Mail: Receiving a postcard with a 5-digit code.
Video: Recording a quick video of your workplace or business documents.

Step 5: How to Use It Daily
Once verified, you manage everything right from your browser or mobile device.
Respond to Reviews: Always thank customers for positive feedback and politely address any negative reviews.
Create Updates: Post announcements, special offers, or events directly to your profile.
Answer Messages: Turn on the chat feature to allow potential customers to message you directly.



For a visual guide on setting up your account:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TNrsBxxkjbA Google Business Profile Set Up: 2026 Step-by-Step Tutorial, Source: Santrel Media

Tool 2 Webnode

Webnode is a user-friendly, cloud-based website builder (often referred to as a "no-code" builder) that allows individuals and small businesses to create websites, online stores (e-shops), or blogs without needing to know how to code or program.



1. Register and Choose a Site Type
Head over to Webnode and click Register.
Enter your website name, your email address, and a password.
Select whether you are building a standard Website, an E-shop, or a Blog.
2. Select a Template
Browse the professional template catalogue and pick a design that matches your goals.
Don't stress too much about the initial look, as you can easily swap fonts, colors, and layouts later. [1, 2]
3. Edit and Customize
Add Content: Click the plus sign (+) icons that appear between sections on your page to add new text blocks, image galleries, videos, or contact forms.

Drag and Drop: Click and hold any element to rearrange it on the page.
Edit Text: Click directly on any text to change it, and use the floating toolbar to adjust headings (H1, H2), bold text, or add links.
Manage Pages: Click Pages in the top menu to add new pages, rename navigation links, or adjust SEO settings for individual pages.

4. Publish to the Web
When your site looks ready, simply click the Publish button in the top right corner of the editor.
Your website is now live and accessible to the public.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tSP6XlUD8aI

Tool 3 Wix:



Wix is a user-friendly, cloud-based website builder (often referred to as a "no-code" builder) that allows individuals and small businesses to create websites, online stores (e-shops), or blogs without needing to know how to code or program. Unlike simpler builders, Wix offers absolute design freedom with its highly flexible drag-and-drop editor

1. Register and Choose a Site Type
   - Head over to Wix and click Get Started or Sign Up.
   - Enter your email address and a password (or sign up quickly using your Google or Facebook account).
   - Answer a few quick questions about your project so Wix can help you determine whether you are building a standard Website (business, portfolio, event), an E-shop, or a Blog.
2. Select a Template
   - Browse the professional template catalogue (featuring over 800 designer-made options) and pick a design that matches your goals.
   - Note: Choose carefully, as Wix does not allow you to swap your entire template for a completely different one once you start editing, though you can manually customize every single element, font, color, and layout later.
3. Edit and Customize
   - Add Content: Click the plus sign (+) icon on the left-side menu to add new text blocks, image galleries, buttons, videos, or contact forms.
   - Drag and Drop: Click and hold any element to rearrange it and place it absolutely anywhere on the page with pixel-perfect precision.
   - Edit Text: Click directly on any text, select Edit Text, and use the floating toolbar to adjust headings (H1, H2), fonts, sizes, or add links.
   - Manage Pages: Click Pages & Menu in the left menu to add new pages, rename navigation links, or adjust SEO settings for individual pages.
4. Publish to the Web
   - Before going live, click Preview to see how your site looks on both desktop and mobile devices.
   - When your site looks ready, simply click the Publish button in the top right corner of the editor.
   - Your website is now live and accessible to the public.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KuxgVfugxEk

Tool 4 Googleforms

Google Forms is a highly popular, cloud-based software service developed by Google that specializes in online form building, surveys, quizzes, and data collection. Unlike Typeform's "one question at a time" conversational flow, Google Forms is widely known for its traditional, clean, and straightforward layout that displays questions vertically on a single page (or organized into clean pages using sections), making it incredibly fast to build and easy for respondents to fill out.

1. Create the Form

- Go to Google Forms and log in with your Google Account.
- Click the Blank form button (represented by a plus sign) to start from scratch.
- Alternatively, you can choose to use a Template from the Template Gallery (e.g., RSVP, Contact Information, Event Feedback) to get a head start.

2. Add and Edit Questions

- Click the floating + (Add question) icon on the right-hand vertical toolbar to add a new question.
- Select your question type from the dropdown menu (e.g., Short answer, Paragraph, Multiple choice, Checkboxes, Dropdown, Linear scale, or Grid options).
- Type your question directly into the editor field.
- Use the toggle at the bottom of the question box to make a question Required.
- Click the three dots (More options) in the bottom right of any question card to access advanced features like Go to section based on answer (which functions as Google's simplified version of logic jumps to route users to custom paths).

3. Design and Brand

- Click the Customize Theme icon (paintbrush palette symbol) in the top-right toolbar.
- Change the font style and size for your headers, questions, and body text.
- Choose a cohesive color scheme for your background and accent lines, or upload a custom Header Image(Google will automatically suggest matching accent colors based on the image you upload).
- You can also insert images or YouTube videos directly into specific questions or as standalone sections using the vertical toolbar on the right.

4. Publish and Share

- Click the Preview icon (eye symbol) in the top right to see exactly how your form looks to respondents on both desktop and mobile devices.
- Once ready, click the purple Send button in the top right corner.
- Choose how you want to share it:
  - Email: Send it directly to specific email addresses.
  - Link: Copy the unique form link (and optionally check "Shorten URL" for a cleaner link).
  - Embed: Grab the HTML embed code to seamlessly place the form directly onto your website.
- Bonus: Go to the Responses tab at the top and click the green Google Sheets icon to automatically link your form to a spreadsheet, allowing you to track and analyze all incoming entries in real time.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I4T-FGZo7zo

Tool 5: Typeform

Typeform is a popular cloud-based software service that specializes in online form building, surveys, and data collection. Unlike traditional online forms that display a long, sometimes intimidating list of questions all at once, Typeform is widely known for its unique "one question at a time" conversational interface.

1. Create the Form
   - Go to https://www.typeform.com/ and log in.
   - Click the Create Typeform button.
   - Choose to Start from scratch, use a Template, or use Typeform AI to generate a form using a simple text prompt.
2. Add and Edit Questions
   - Click + Add content in the left-hand panel to add a new question.
   - Select your question type (e.g., Multiple Choice, Short Text, Email, Opinion Scale) from the dropdown menu.
   - Type your question into the WYSIWYG editor. Use the @ symbol to pipe in answers from previous questions (e.g., "Thanks, @Name!" for a personal touch).
   - Use the right-hand panel to toggle settings like Required or to add Logic Jumps for custom question paths.
3. Design and Brand
   - Click the Design icon (paintbrush symbol) on the left to open the theme gallery.
   - Choose a preset theme, or build your own by changing background colors, button colors, and fonts.
   - Add a background image, upload your brand logo, or insert images/videos directly into specific questions
4. Publish and Share
   - Switch between the Desktop and Mobile preview icons to ensure your form looks great on all devices.
   - Click the Publish button to make your form live.

Go to the Share tab to copy your unique form link, grab an embed code for your website, or send it directly via email.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7iGc-tVGilo

Typeform

Tool 6: HubSpot CRM (Free Tier)

HubSpot CRM (Free Tier) is a highly popular, cloud-based Customer Relationship Management platform designed to help businesses organize, track, and nurture their relationships with leads and customers. The "Free Tier" refers to HubSpot's remarkably generous free version, which provides small businesses and startups with core foundational tools without any expiration date or subscription fee.

1. Account Setup and Navigation

- Sign Up: Navigate to the HubSpot CRM page to create your account.
- Interface: Once logged in, the top navigation bar gives you access to the main workspaces: Contacts,Communication, Sales (Deals), Service (Tickets), and Reports.

2. Add and Manage Contacts

Your CRM is only as good as the data you put into it.

- Manual Entry: In the top left, click Contacts > Contacts > Create contact to add individuals one by one.
- Bulk Import: If you already have a customer list, you can import your spreadsheets (CSV, XLSX) by navigating to Contacts > Contacts > Import in the top right.
- Companies & Linking: Once you have contacts, associate them with organizations by using the Companiestab to build a clear overview of your accounts.

3. Connect Your Email and Calendar

Integrating your communication tools allows you to track correspondence automatically.

- Go to the Settings gear icon in the top right corner.
- Under the General menu, navigate to Email > Connect personal email.
- You can seamlessly connect Gmail, Microsoft Office 365, or any IMAP account.
- Once connected, you can send emails directly from HubSpot records, track when prospects open your emails, and utilize customized email templates.

4. Manage Deals and the Sales Pipeline

The CRM's primary function is to help you track revenue and sales opportunities.

- Go to Sales > Deals.
- A drag-and-drop board of your sales phases (e.g., Appointment Scheduled, Contract Sent, Closed Won, Closed Lost) will appear.
- Click Create deal to add a new sales opportunity.
- Enter the deal amount, connect it to the corresponding contact, and drag it across the visual pipeline as it moves closer to closing.

5. Additional Free Tools

The free tier also offers extra sales and marketing features to help streamline your daily operations:

- Meeting Links: Sync your calendar so clients can book meetings with you directly, eliminating back-and-forth emails.
- Snippets: Create short, reusable blocks of text to quickly answer common prospect questions.

For a step-by-step visual walkthrough of how to navigate the dashboard, set up pipelines, and invite team members to your free workspace:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8QM5zunC44



OTHER PROS AND CONS OF THE DIFFERNET CRM METHODS
https://www.deelo.ai/best/crm-for-farms

8. SUSTAINABILITY LINK

The introduction of modern entrepreneurial systems and digital tools into the agro-tourism sector supports all three core pillars of international sustainability:

- Economic Longevity via Short Value Chains: By bypassing intermediaries and retaining direct digital payments, smallholders capture the true value of their labor. This extra financial padding cross-subsidizes low-margin primary farming practices, preserving rural land use.
- Social Heritage Safeguarding: Experience-driven storytelling forces the active rediscovery, cataloging, and defense of endangered local recipes, artisanal skills, and historic traditions. This elevates community pride and transforms regional heritage into a viable career path for young rural professionals.
- Environmental Footprint Minimization: Migrating to digital workflows (e.g., cloud-based feedback loops, online booking trackers, digital menus) reduces paper waste. Crucially, gathering precise pre-arrival guest data allows operators to forecast exact catering needs, directly tackling food waste and optimizing cold-storage power usage.

General Institutional Resources on Sustainable Tourism

Organisation	Resource	Link
FAO	Sustainable Agritourism in the Mediterranean (2024)	fao.org
UN Tourism (UNWTO)	Tourism for the SDGs — Agenda 2030	untourism.int
European Commission	Farm to Fork Strategy — Green Deal	ec.europa.eu
GSTC	Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria	gstc.org
Green Key	Eco-certification for accommodation	greenkey.global
EU Ecolabel	European certification for tourist accommodation	ec.europa.eu/ecolabel
Booking.com / GSTC	Sustainable Travel Report 2024	gstc.org

9. KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Dismantle the Digital Paradox: Digital tools do not dilute the rustic charm of rural tourism. They serve as the critical bridge that allows your authentic heritage product to be discovered by premium travelers.
- Engineer Memories, Not Just Inventory: Modern travelers do not buy beds; they buy transformation, discovery, and connection. Reframe standard daily farm chores into interactive customer memories.
- Own Your Digital Reputation: Verified online reviews on mapping networks represent the ultimate currency of trust. A single properly optimized, free digital business profile can easily outperform traditional, high-cost print advertising.
- Prioritize Direct Channels: Every reservation secured through your own digital platform eliminates intermediary fees. Direct customer channels are the fastest path to long-term economic autonomy.

10. ASSESSMENT.

Service Improvement Plan
Using the visitor journey map from the Interactive Exercise, submit a one-page plan for a real or illustrative farm stay that includes:
1. The three biggest problems you found in the visitor journey.
2. For each problem, one concrete action and the free tool you would use.
3. A 40–60 word pre-arrival email that includes a Google Maps link.
4. One indicator you will measure for three months (e.g. number of direct bookings or reviews).

Assessment criteria
Problem analysis – 25 points
Feasibility of actions – 30 points
Pre-arrival email – 20 points
Indicator – 15 points
Clarity – 10 points
Total: 100 points. Satisfactory result: at least 60 points.

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VETourismo

MODULE 3.2

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT & CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

VETourismo

ADVANCING DIGITAL AND SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN AGRO-TOURISM FOR VETS

Project Number: 2025-1-DE02-KA220-VET-000361332

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VETourismo

MODULE 4.1

LOCAL IDENTITY & GASTRONOMY

VETourismo

ADVANCING DIGITAL AND SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN AGRO-TOURISM FOR VETS

Project Number: 2025-1-DE02-KA220-VET-000361332

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1. INTRODUCTION

Călimănești–Cozia area (https://valceaturistica.ro/calimanesti-caciulata/atractii/) , located in the center of Romania, Valcea county ,200 km away from Bucharest , the capital city of the country, is known for its natural beauty, thermal springs, rural traditions, and rich culinary heritage. Local identity is reflected in the customs, stories, crafts, and ways of life that have been passed down through generations. Gastronomy is an important part of this identity, expressed through traditional dishes, locally produced ingredients, and recipes connected to the region's history and culture.

For visitors, tasting local food is often one of the most memorable parts of a trip. Traditional products such as homemade cheeses, fruit preserves, honey, seasonal vegetables, and regional recipes help create authentic experiences that distinguish the destination from others. When local gastronomy is combined with hospitality, nature, and cultural heritage, it becomes a valuable asset for agro-tourism.

Agro-Tourism -Local identity and gastronomy help agro-tourism businesses offer experiences that are unique and authentic. Visitors increasingly seek opportunities to discover local traditions, meet producers, and enjoy food made from regional ingredients. These experiences encourage longer stays, positive reviews, and repeat visits while supporting sustainable tourism development.

VET Learners-For learners in vocational education and training (VET), knowledge of local identity and gastronomy develops practical skills relevant to tourism, hospitality, and entrepreneurship. Understanding local products and traditions enables future professionals to:

- Promote regional tourism more effectively.
- Design authentic visitor experiences.
- Improve customer service through storytelling and cultural interpretation.
- Strengthen their employability in the tourism and hospitality sectors.

Rural Businesses-Local gastronomy creates opportunities for cooperation among guesthouses, farms, restaurants, food producers, and artisans. By using and promoting local products, rural businesses can:



- Increase their income.
- Add value to agricultural production.
- Strengthen local supply chains.
- Preserve cultural heritage while creating new economic opportunities.

Practical Example
A guesthouse in the Călimănești–Cozia area offers breakfast with locally produced honey, cheese, homemade bread, and fruit jam. Guests are invited to visit nearby farms and learn about traditional food preparation. This simple experience connects tourism with agriculture, supports local producers, and gives visitors a deeper understanding of the region.

Reflection Question
What local food product or tradition from the Călimănești–Cozia area could be transformed into an attractive agro-tourism experience for visitors?



2. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this module, learners will be able to...

- To analyze the local identity resources of a micro-destination in Vâlcea County and transform them into a cohernt gastronomic experience proposal.
- To design a "farm-to-table" package using at least three local products, a storytelling narrative, a logistical flow, and a recommended price range.
- To apply at least two digital tools for promoting and booking the experience, thus addressing the WP2 need for greater visibility and operational entrepreneurial skills.
- To evaluate the economic, social, and environmental impact of a rural gastronomic offer.
- To present a viable mini-project for a rural tourism operator in the northern part of Vâlcea County, demonstrating the transition from theoretical knowledge to practical implementation.

WP2 Findings Addressed by This Module:
-Weak entrepreneurial and customer service competences
-Overly theoretical VET programs /Limited practical learning and work-based exposure

3. PRACTICAL BACKGROUND

Local Food, Traditional Recipes and Gastronomic Heritage -main aspects of Agro-Tourism in Vâlcea County: The Călimănești–Căciulata–Cozia Area and Țara Loviștei

Local Food, Traditional Recipes and Gastronomic Heritage as Key Elements of Agro-Tourism in Vâlcea County

3.1. Introduction

Local food and gastronomy play a vital role in shaping the identity and attractiveness of agro-tourism destinations. Today's travelers increasingly seek authentic experiences that allow them to connect with local culture, traditions, and ways of life. In rural areas, food is much more than a basic necessity; it reflects history, heritage, landscapes, and community values. Through traditional recipes, local ingredients, and culinary customs, visitors gain a deeper understanding of a destination and its people.Vâlcea County is one of Romania's regions where natural beauty, cultural heritage, and gastronomy come together to create unique tourism experiences. The county is known for its mountains, forests, orchards, monasteries, spa resorts, and traditional rural communities. Within this wider context, the Călimănești–Căciulata–Cozia area and the historic region of Țara Loviștei stand out as important agro-tourism destinations where local food and traditions continue to play a central role in everyday life.

3.2. Gastronomic Heritage of Vâlcea County

The gastronomic heritage of Vâlcea County is closely connected to agriculture, shepherding, fruit growing, beekeeping, and traditional food production. The region offers a wide variety of local products, including homemade cheeses, honey, fruit preserves, syrups, vegetables, mushrooms, forest berries, smoked meats, and traditional bakery products.Many of these foods are produced using methods that have been preserved and transmitted through generations, making them an important part of the county's cultural identity.

3.3. Traditional Recipes and Local Culinary Identity

In the Călimănești–Căciulata–Cozia area and Țara Loviștei, traditional dishes such as mămăligă with cheese and sour cream, bulz ciobănesc, bean soup, vegetable stews, homemade pies, and seasonal fruit desserts continue to be prepared and served in rural households and guesthouses.These recipes are more than culinary products; they are expressions of local history and traditions. By tasting these dishes, visitors experience the culture of the region in a direct and memorable way.

Traditional recipes represent a valuable form of cultural heritage. They preserve local knowledge, family traditions, and community identity while offering tourists authentic experiences that cannot easily be replicated elsewhere. Food therefore becomes an important storytelling tool, allowing visitors to learn about local customs, agricultural practices, and the relationship between communities and their environment.

3.4. The Role of Gastronomy in Agro-Tourism Attractiveness

Local gastronomy contributes significantly to the attractiveness of agro-tourism destinations. Modern tourists increasingly seek experiences that are authentic, sustainable, and connected to local culture. They wish to meet producers, discover traditional cooking methods, taste regional products, and understand the stories behind the food they consume.These experiences help differentiate Vâlcea County from other destinations and strengthen its reputation as a place where visitors can enjoy both natural and cultural heritage.

3.5. Seasonal Menus in Rural Tourism for Northern Vâlcea

Season	Appetizer	Main Course	Tasting Finale	Associated Story
Spring	Fresh telemea cheese or fresh cheese with herbs	Polenta with cheese and sour cream / seasonal soup	Honey and herbal tea	"Heading to the mountains after winter"
Summer	Cold platter with dairy products and local vegetables	Garden vegetable stew / free-range chicken	Syrup, homemade jam, and fresh fruits	"The garden and the sheepfold in the same day"
Autumn	Zacuscă, roasted vegetables, and aged cheese	Bulz (traditional polenta dish), mushroom stew, or polenta	Honey, walnuts, and preserved plums	"The Subcarpathian pantry"
Winter	Warm homemade appetizer	Hearty soup and oven-baked traditional dish	Herbal tea, preserves, and bee products	"Winter hospitality on the Olt Valley"

Seasonal menus are an important component of the rural tourism offer because they promote local products and culinary traditions specific to each season.

3.6. Tourist Participation in Traditional Food Production

Tourists can actively participate in various processes involved in producing agri-food products. They may help harvest fruits and vegetables and prepare preserves for autumn, such as zacuscă, jams, preserves, and pickles.Visitors can also take part in traditional rural household activities, especially during the winter holidays, including pig slaughtering and the preparation of seasonal products. Furthermore, they may participate in the making of traditional culinary and pastry products such as festive dishes, sweet breads, and pies.During the Easter season, visitors can join egg-dyeing activities using natural and eco-friendly materials and learn the traditional art of decorating Easter eggs.

3.7. Farm-to-Table Experiences and Local Producers

One of the most effective ways of integrating gastronomy into agro-tourism is through the farm-to-table concept. This approach promotes the use of locally sourced ingredients and encourages direct interaction between visitors and producers.

Guesthouses and rural tourism operators can collaborate with local farmers, beekeepers, shepherds, and orchard owners to offer fresh products and authentic experiences. Visitors may participate in harvesting fruit, observing cheese production, collecting honey, or attending traditional cooking workshops.Such activities create meaningful connections between tourism, agriculture, and local communities.

3.8. Economic and Social Benefits for Rural Communities-gastronomy, festivals and Cultural events

The promotion of local gastronomy generates important benefits for rural areas throughout Vâlcea County. Increased demand for local products supports farmers, artisans, and small businesses while creating additional sources of income.It encourages cooperation among tourism providers and producers, strengthens local supply chains, and contributes to preserving traditions that might otherwise disappear. Agro-tourism therefore becomes an important instrument for sustainable rural development.Food can also be linked to local culture through festivals, fairs, religious celebrations, and craft events. Across Vâlcea County, many cultural activities highlight traditional foods, local products, folklore, and craftsmanship.These events enrich the visitor experience by creating opportunities to discover the region's traditions in an interactive and engaging way.

3.9. Practical Agro-Tourism Experience in the Călimănești–Cozia Area

A practical example is a weekend agro-tourism package in the Călimănești–Cozia area. Visitors stay in a rural guesthouse, enjoy breakfasts prepared with local products, visit nearby farms and orchards, participate in cheese-making or jam-making workshops, meet local artisans, and enjoy traditional dinners inspired by the culinary heritage of Țara Loviștei and Vâlcea County.Such experiences combine gastronomy, culture, agriculture, and hospitality into a memorable tourism product.

3.10 Relevance for Vocational Education and Training (VET)

For learners in vocational education and training (VET), understanding the relationship between gastronomy, culture, and tourism is particularly important. Future professionals in tourism and hospitality need the skills to promote local products, design authentic experiences, use storytelling techniques, and collaborate with rural producers.These competencies improve employability while supporting sustainable tourism and local economic development.

3.11. Conclusion

Local food, traditional recipes, and gastronomic heritage are essential elements of the identity and attractiveness of Vâlcea County, particularly in the Călimănești–Căciulata–Cozia area and Țara Loviștei. They help preserve cultural heritage, support rural communities, strengthen agro-tourism businesses, and create memorable experiences for visitors. By valuing and promoting local gastronomy, the region can continue to develop sustainable tourism while safeguarding its unique cultural identity for future generations.

4. PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Step One: Auditing the Local Identity
The operator begins by inventorying resources in five categories: place, products, people, rituals, and infrastructure. For northern Vâlcea, a minimum audit sheet should include: what makes the area distinctive at the local level; what can be tasted here that cannot be found in another county; which route or attraction justifies the visit; what credible story can be told; and what logistical limitations exist.

In Călimănești, the answers may start with the spa resort, the Balneary Treatment Promenade, the Cozia Massif, Arutela, and the proximity of monasteries. In Racovița and Perișani, they may focus on the household farm, valley landscapes, sheepfolds, beekeeping, and the rhythms of Țara Loviștei.

Methodological Note: The examples are based on the area's public infrastructure and landmarks, while the product categories align with the model of local gastronomic points operating within the county.

Step Two: Selecting Anchor Products
The experience should be built around a maximum of three anchor products. If there are too many, the experience becomes confusing; if there are too few, the story remains weak.

For northern Vâlcea, the recommended educational approach is to select three anchors from different product families:

- one dairy product;
- one honey-based or pantry product;
- one seasonal cooked dish.

This is also where the distinction between authentic and generic becomes important. “Sheepfold cheese served with polenta and seasonal herbs” is far more credible than a vague “traditional mixed platter” with no explanation.The Local Gastronomic Point (LGP) model in Vâlcea reinforces this direction by emphasizing natural local ingredients, dishes prepared on the same day, and seasonal freshness.

Step Three: Building the Story
Every experience should be summarized in a single core sentence.
For the northern Vâlcea example, a suitable statement is:
"From the thermal waters and landscapes of the Olt Valley to the flavors of the sheepfold and the Sub-Carpathian pantry."
The story should then be divided into three sequences:

1. Arrival;
2. Tasting experience;
3. Memory transfer.

“Memory transfer” refers to what the visitor takes away: a recipe, a jar of local produce, a QR code, a photograph, a map, or a personal story.
Within VET curricula, this is the moment when customer care and storytelling skills become just as important as the culinary product itself.

Step Four: Designing the Logistics Flow
The logistics flow should be drafted before any promotional activity begins.

A basic model includes:
- meeting point;
- access method;
- duration;
- schedule for each activity;
- visitor capacity;
- host preparation time;
- bad-weather alternatives;
- booking contact person.

This stage teaches learners how to transform an "idea" into a "service."
Publicly listed Local Gastronomic Points in Vâlcea typically operate with limited schedules, advance reservations, and small capacities. This represents the realistic rural model rather than the continuous availability of an urban restaurant.

Step Five: Structuring the Seasonal Menu
The seasonal menu should follow both a culinary and an economic logic.

The recommended formula for rural operators is:
- simple appetizer;
- signature main dish;
- dessert or pantry product;
- simple local beverage.

A fixed menu reduces waste and simplifies organization. This is one of the main advantages of Local Gastronomic Points, where ingredient freshness and seasonal availability are integral parts of the experience.

Step Six: Pricing the Experience
In rural tourism, prices should not be determined by copying urban restaurant models. Instead, they should be based on:
- direct costs;
- host labor time;
- logistics costs;
- experiential value.

For LMS activities, the recommended formula is: Price per person = Ingredient cost + Host labor cost + Logistics cost + Storytelling/guiding cost + Safety margin
For local practice, price ranges are recommended instead of a single fixed tariff, allowing operators to adapt to different group sizes and seasonal variations.

Step Seven: "Taste of the Region" Tourism Package
Title
Taste of the Region – The Olt Valley Between Thermal Waters, Sheepfold Traditions, and the Rural Pantry

Duration-1 day
Target Audience
- Couples
- Small groups
- Active seniors
- Wellness tourists
- Cultural tourists

Capacity-10–14 participants

Three Anchor Products
- Dairy product or farmhouse/sheepfold cheese from the Racovița micro-region;
- Honey or pantry product from the Perișani micro-region;
- Seasonal cooked dish served in Călimănești or at a partner household.

Visitor Story
"In northern Vâlcea, thermal waters and mountain life coexist naturally. The day begins in a spa destination known for wellness and continues through a landscape where flavors are preserved through the rhythm of rural households: milk, honey, herbs, polenta, preserves, and herbal teas. Every stop tells the same story: here, food is deeply connected to place."

Proposed Logistics
- 09:30 – Meeting point in Călimănești;
- 09:45–10:30 – Guided walk along a representative section of the Balneary Treatment Promenade;
- 10:30–11:00 – Transfer to a gastronomic product stop;
- 11:00–12:00 – Dairy product demonstration and tasting;
- 12:15–13:30 – Seasonal lunch;
- 14:00–15:00 – Visit to a local farmer, beekeeper, or pantry workshop;
- 15:00–15:30 – QR recipe card and group photo;
- 16:00 – Return to Călimănești.

Recommended Price Range-220–340 RON per person for groups of 10–14 participants, excluding individual transportation to the meeting point.

Operational Rule-The final version of the package should be published in the LMS only after the names of active suppliers and their contact details have been verified and validated on-site.



5. CASE STUDY

Casa Daria Guesthouse – Developing Agro-Tourism through Glamping in Călimănești

https://www.booking.com/Share-1OIA30

Context

Casa Daria Guesthouse is located in the town of Călimănești, Vâlcea County, an area renowned for its natural landscapes, mineral springs, and proximity to Cozia National Park. In recent years, tourists' preferences have increasingly shifted toward authentic, sustainable, and nature-oriented experiences.

To meet this demand, the guesthouse owners decided to diversify their tourism offer by creating glamping (luxury camping) facilities integrated into an agro-tourism concept.

Challenges

- Limited awareness of the glamping concept.
- Competition from traditional hotels and guesthouses.
- High development and installation costs.
- Seasonality of tourism activities.
- The need for effective marketing and promotion.

Actions

1. Development of glamping accommodation facilities.
2. Online promotion through social media and booking platforms.
3. Organization of local product tastings and agricultural activities.
4. Collaboration with local producers and suppliers.
5. Creation of themed tourism packages.

Results

- Increase in the number of tourists.
- Diversification of the services offered.
- Growth in direct bookings.
- Development of local partnerships.
- Strengthening of the guesthouse's image as an agro-tourism destination.

Lessons Learned

- Service diversification increases competitiveness.
- Authentic experiences are highly valued by tourists.
- Digital marketing is essential for success.
- Local partnerships add value to the tourism experience.
- Sustainability contributes to long-term success.

Reflection Question

How can Casa Daria Guesthouse develop new agro-tourism experiences to attract tourists during the off-season?

6. INTERACTIVE EXERCISE

Practical Agro-Tourism Challenge
Scenario: Designing a Local Gastronomy Experience for an Agro-Tourism Guesthouse
You are members of the culinary team of an agro-tourism guesthouse preparing a special weekend menu for tourists who want to discover the local gastronomic heritage of the region.
The guesthouse owner has asked your team to create an authentic culinary experience using products purchased from local producers while respecting quality, sustainability, hygiene, and budget requirements.

Your Mission-50 minutes lesson
https://youtu.be/4oT3qqUvebQ

Step 1 – Source Local Products
Visit a local market, farm, or producer (real or simulated)- in this case- Calimanesti local market which is located near our school

Your team must:
- Identify suitable local suppliers.
- Select ingredients for a traditional dish.
- Justify your choices based on freshness, quality, seasonality, price, and sustainability.
- Complete a reception and quality-control checklist.

Decision to make: Which products will you purchase and why?

Step 2 – Prepare the Ingredients
Inspect and process the selected raw materials.
Your team must:
- Check quality and food safety requirements.
- Decide which preparation techniques are most appropriate.
- Weigh, wash, clean, portion, and store ingredients correctly.

Decision to make: Which ingredients require special handling to maintain quality and reduce waste?

Step 3 – Produce the Dish
Prepare a traditional local recipe suitable for an agro-tourism menu.
Your team must:
- Follow the technological process.
- Apply appropriate cooking methods.
- Respect hygiene and safety standards.

Decision to make: How can the recipe be adapted to enhance authenticity while meeting tourist expectations?

Step 4 – Present and Evaluate

Prepare the dish for service.
Your team must:

- Design an attractive presentation.
- Explain the local origin of the ingredients.
- Conduct a sensory evaluation.

Decision to make: How will you present the dish to make it appealing to visitors seeking authentic rural experiences?

Step 5 – Create an Agro-Tourism Menu

Design a mini-menu for the guesthouse.Your menu must include:

- One starter.
- One main course.
- One dessert.
- A brief description highlighting local products and traditions.

Decision to make: Which dishes best represent the region and contribute to the guesthouse's identity?

Step 6 – Think Like an Entrepreneur

The guesthouse wants to increase its competitiveness. Your team must:

- Propose one culinary event or activity linked to local food (cooking workshop, tasting session, farm visit, harvest experience, etc.).
- Explain how it could attract tourists and generate additional income.

Decision to make: Which activity offers the greatest benefit for both tourists and the local community?

Final Product-Assessment -Each team presents:

1. The prepared dish.
2. The agro-tourism menu.
3. The selected suppliers.
4. The proposed tourist food experience.

Reflection Question-If you were the owner of the guesthouse, what would be your most important decision to ensure both customer satisfaction and long-term sustainability?

7. DIGITAL TOOL

Digital Tools Explained Operationally

Tool	Use in the Module	Operational Steps	Main Benefit	Main Limitation
Instagram Storytelling	Narrative presentation of the experience	Define 5 story frames: the location, the ingredient, the host, the dish, and the booking invitation; use geotags, thematic highlights, and a short reel.	Makes the story visible, not just the product.	Requires editorial discipline and consistent content creation.
Google Business Profile and Google Maps	Location, trust-building, booking, and information	Claim or create a profile; complete the business name, category, opening hours, phone number, photos, and useful directions; verify that the profile appears in Google Search and Maps.	Increases the company's visibility in Google Search and Maps.	Requires continuous updates of schedules and business information.
Google My Maps	Mapping products and the visitor route	Create a map with separate layers for producers, attractions, parking areas, photo points, and water/restroom facilities; share it internally or publicly.	Organizes the experience visually and supports complex logistics.	Depends on accurate and consistent data entry.
QR Code Recipe Cards	Educational extension of the visit	Upload the recipe to a PDF or LMS, generate a QR code, and attach it to a table, label, or brochure.	Transforms the meal into an educational and memorable experience.	Links must be maintained, and the design should be tested on mobile devices.

Instagram is relevant to this module because the platform enables the publication of photos and short videos, geographic tagging, and the organization of content around visual landmarks that are easy for tourists to consume. For small tourism operators, the main advantage is not “going viral” but maintaining narrative consistency and a repeatable content format.

For Google Business Profile, Google's official documentation explicitly states that after creating and verifying a profile, customers can find the business on Google Search and Google Maps, while the operator can control how business information is displayed. This represents one of the most important basic digital competencies for rural tourism operators.

For mapping purposes, access to Google My Maps is available through a Google account at mymaps.google.com. In practice, this tool can be used within the module to create a local product map with separate layers for tasting locations, cultural heritage sites, accessibility, and safety-related information.

Step-by-step: Google My Maps – Local Product Map
Step 1 – Go to mymaps.google.com, sign in with a Google account and click "Create a new map".
Step 2 – Create three layers: "Producers & tastings", "Heritage sites", "Practical info" (parking, toilets, accessibility).
Step 3 – Add each place by search or by dropping a pin; in the description write what visitors can taste or see, opening times and booking contact.
Step 4 – Add one photo per place (only your own photos or photos you have permission to use).
Step 5 – Use "Add directions" to draw the route of your "Taste of the Region" day.
Step 6 – Click "Share", allow "anyone with the link" to view, and turn the link into a QR code for recipe cards and your Instagram bio.
Cost: free. Limitations: needs a Google account; check details with each producer before publishing; update the map every season.

8. SUSTAINABILITY LINK

Sustainability, within this module, is not a theoretical add-on. It is embedded in the very architecture of the product. Local Gastronomic Points (LGPs) in Vâlcea operate with fixed menus, local products, home-grown ingredients, limited operating schedules, and advance reservations. This model helps reduce food waste, shorten supply chains, and retain economic value within the local community. The European Commission is moving in the same direction by explaining that quality schemes and the new rules on Geographical Indications (GIs) make it possible to promote environmental, economic, and social sustainability practices.

For operators in Vâlcea, the key lesson is not necessarily that they must obtain a European quality label tomorrow, but rather that they need to learn how to document and communicate responsible practices: local sourcing, seasonality, traceability, cooperation with small-scale producers, and waste reduction. UNESCO warns that heritage becomes vulnerable to unsustainable tourism and uncontrolled development. In northern Vâlcea, where landscapes, spirituality, and historical memory are active components of the tourism product, responsible gastronomy represents a practical form of conservation: fewer large and impersonal tourist flows, and more small-scale, pre-booked, well-interpreted experiences that are deeply rooted in the local community.

Dimension	Common Risk	Recommended Response
Economic	Money leaving the local community	Local sourcing, small groups, and a fair profit margin for the host
Social	The community becomes merely a backdrop for tourism	The host shares local stories, producers are visible, and scheduling respects the local way of life
Environmental	Food waste and unnecessary transportation	Fixed menus, seasonality, and compact travel routes
Cultural	Superficial folklorization	Storytelling based on authentic practices rather than clichés
Circular Economy	Single-use packaging	Reusable jars and QR code cards instead of excessive printed brochures

9. KEY TAKEAWAYS

Key Conclusions

The first key message of this module is that, in Vâlcea County, gastronomic identity works best when it is connected to a clear territorial axis: a resort, a route, a household, a product, and a story. Călimănești provides the infrastructure and accessibility, while the surrounding villages and local households provide authenticity and depth.

The second key message is that the most suitable model for rural tourism is not the large restaurant but rather the small-scale, reservation-based experience with a fixed menu and an explanation of the products used. This is precisely the approach followed by the local gastronomic points that are already operating successfully within the county.

The third key message is that useful digitalization for rural tourism operators should be simple but consistent: Google Maps for visibility and accessibility, Instagram for storytelling, and QR codes for preserving and sharing knowledge. Digital competence is not defined by technical complexity but by the disciplined and repeatable use of simple tools.

The fourth key message is that responsible gastronomy is an important instrument of sustainability. It helps retain economic value within the local community, reduces food waste, and protects cultural heritage from superficial forms of tourist consumption.

Reflection question

Does the student achieve the professional and key competences required by the Professional Training Standards upon completion of the course? Is this sufficient for labour market integration?

10. ASSESSMENT

ASSIGNMENT/Workstation
The kitchen of the agritourism guesthouse – preparing and serving meals for guests.

Description of activities performed:
• I participated in preparing ingredients for dishes using vegetables, fruits, dairy products, and meat sourced from the
guesthouse's farm or from local producers.
• I assisted in preparing breakfast and the daily menu.
• I performed simple cooking tasks under the supervision of qualified staff.
• I prepared and arranged the tableware and utensils needed for serving.
• I assisted in the preparation of traditional local dishes and in arranging the dishes for serving.
• I followed food safety and hygiene standards.
• I participated in cleaning and sanitizing the workspace after completing my tasks.
• I contributed to the selective collection of food waste and to reducing waste through the efficient use of ingredients.
Technical equipment used:
• Professional stove
• Electric oven
• Refrigerator and freezer
• Mixer/blender
• Professional choppers and knives
• Cookware and kitchen utensils

List of work tasks:
• Receiving and inspecting raw materials;
• Washing and preparing fruits and vegetables;
• Portioning ingredients according to recipes;
• Assisting in the preparation of meals and desserts;
• Maintaining a clean work environment;
 Sorting waste and adhering to sustainability measures;
• Arranging dishes for service.

Comments / Challenges encountered:
• Meeting preparation deadlines during busy periods.
• Proper use of unfamiliar professional equipment.
• Maintaining a consistent work pace and efficiently organizing tasks.

REFERENCES AND IMAGE CREDITS

Working Bibliography and Verifiable Sources

All photographs used in these materials were taken with the informed consent of the participants involved in the activities and their parents (for under 18 year old students)

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VETourismo

MODULE 4.1

LOCAL IDENTITY & GASTRONOMY

VETourismo

ADVANCING DIGITAL AND SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN AGRO-TOURISM FOR VETS

Project Number: 2025-1-DE02-KA220-VET-000361332

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VETourismo

MODULE 4.2

COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM

VETourismo

ADVANCING DIGITAL AND SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN AGRO-TOURISM FOR VETS

Project Number: 2025-1-DE02-KA220-VET-000361332

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1. INTRODUCTION

Rural communities are at the heart of agro-tourism. Visitors are increasingly looking for authentic experiences that allow them to connect with local people, traditions, food, landscapes, and ways of life. While farms, vineyards, and natural attractions may draw visitors to a destination, it is often the local community that creates memorable experiences and encourages visitors to return.Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is an approach that actively involves local people in the planning, development, and delivery of tourism experiences (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009). Rather than being passive observers of tourism activities, community members become partners, hosts, guides, artisans, producers, and entrepreneurs who contribute to and benefit from tourism development. This approach helps ensure that tourism generates positive economic, social, and cultural outcomes while preserving the unique identity of rural areas.

In agro-tourism contexts, community-based tourism can take many forms. Visitors may participate in traditional farming activities, learn local crafts from community members, attend seasonal festivals, enjoy locally produced food, or explore cultural and natural heritage through experiences designed and delivered by local stakeholders. These activities not only enrich the visitor experience but also create new opportunities for income generation, skills development, and community cooperation.
Community-based tourism is particularly relevant for rural areas facing challenges such as population decline, limited economic opportunities, and the loss of traditional knowledge and practices. By encouraging collaboration among farmers, local businesses, cultural associations, educational institutions, and public authorities, community-based tourism can strengthen local networks and contribute to more resilient and sustainable rural communities.

This module introduces the principles and practical application of community-based tourism within agro-tourism settings. Learners will explore how to identify community assets, engage local stakeholders, design inclusive visitor experiences, and use digital tools to promote local heritage and traditions. Through practical examples, case studies, and hands-on activities, learners will develop the skills needed to create tourism experiences that benefit both visitors and local communities.

Reflection
What makes your local community unique? How could these unique characteristics be used to create authentic and sustainable agro-tourism experiences?



2. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this module, learners will be able to:

1.Identify and assess community assets (cultural, natural, social, and economic) that can contribute to the development of agro-tourism experiences.

2.Analyse the role of local stakeholders and develop strategies to engage community members, businesses, associations, and public institutions in tourism initiatives.

3.Design community-based agro-tourism experiences that reflect local identity, promote cultural heritage, and create meaningful interactions between visitors and residents.

4.Apply ethical tourism principles to balance visitor needs, community wellbeing, cultural authenticity, and sustainable rural development.

5.Use digital tools to map, promote, and communicate community-based tourism experiences and local heritage assets.

3. PRACTICAL BACKGROUND

What is Community-Based Tourism?

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is a tourism approach that actively involves local communities in the planning, development, management, and delivery of tourism experiences. Rather than tourism being controlled solely by external investors or tourism businesses, community members play a central role in shaping visitor experiences and sharing the benefits generated by tourism activities (Santos & Anzaldúa-Soulé, 2023).

The main goal of community-based tourism is to ensure that tourism contributes positively to local development while preserving the social, cultural, and environmental values of the destination. Community members are not simply part of the tourism landscape; they become active participants, decision-makers, hosts, guides, producers, and entrepreneurs.

In rural and agro-tourism settings, community-based tourism helps connect visitors with authentic local experiences such as traditional farming practices, local gastronomy, cultural events, crafts, and everyday rural life. By involving local people directly, tourism can create meaningful experiences for visitors while generating income and opportunities for the community.

Core Principles of Community-Based Tourism

Although community-based tourism initiatives vary across regions and countries, they generally share several key principles:

Participation

Community members should be involved in tourism planning and decision-making processes. Their knowledge, needs, and aspirations should help shape tourism development.

Inclusion

Tourism opportunities should be accessible to different groups within the community, including women, young people, small producers, artisans, and vulnerable groups. Inclusive tourism helps distribute benefits more widely.

Authenticity

Community-based tourism seeks to offer genuine experiences that reflect local culture, traditions, and ways of life. Visitors increasingly value authentic interactions rather than standardized tourism products.

Fair Distribution of Benefits

Tourism revenues should benefit the wider community rather than a small number of individuals or businesses. This may include supporting local employment, local suppliers, community projects, and small enterprises.

Respect for Culture and Traditions

Local customs, cultural heritage, languages, crafts, and traditional knowledge should be respected and preserved. Tourism should strengthen local identity rather than replace or commercialize it excessively.

Environmental Responsibility

Tourism activities should protect natural resources, landscapes, biodiversity, and agricultural environments. Sustainable management helps ensure that tourism remains viable in the long term.

Why Community-Based Tourism Matters in Agro-Tourism

Agro-tourism combines agricultural activities with tourism experiences, allowing visitors to learn about farming, food production, rural traditions, and local lifestyles. Community-based tourism can help distribute the benefits of tourism more evenly across rural areas by supporting local businesses, creating employment opportunities, and encouraging collaboration among community stakeholders (OECD, 2024).

Additional Income for Farmers and Rural Households

Many rural areas face economic challenges, including fluctuating agricultural income and limited employment opportunities. Community-based tourism provides opportunities for farmers and local residents to diversify their income through activities such as guided tours, workshops, accommodation, local food experiences, and craft sales.

Preservation of Local Traditions and Heritage

Traditional farming techniques, recipes, festivals, crafts, and cultural practices are valuable assets that can be shared with visitors. Community-based tourism encourages communities to preserve and celebrate these traditions while creating educational and engaging experiences.

Stronger Local Networks and Partnerships

Successful community-based tourism requires cooperation among farmers, local businesses, municipalities, schools, cultural associations, and tourism providers. These partnerships strengthen community cohesion and encourage collaborative local development.

More Meaningful Visitor Experiences

Modern tourists increasingly seek experiences that are authentic, educational, and socially meaningful. Community-based tourism allows visitors to interact directly with local people, gain insight into rural life, and develop a deeper understanding of the destination.

Sustainable Rural Development

When managed responsibly, community-based tourism contributes to sustainable rural development by supporting local economies, protecting cultural heritage, and encouraging environmental stewardship. It helps communities build resilience while maintaining their unique character.

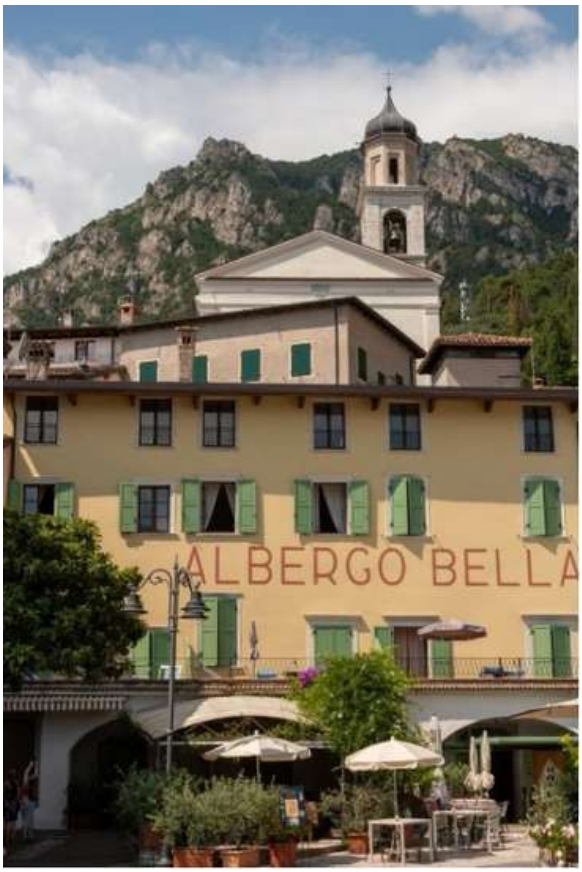
European Examples of Community-Based Tourism
Across Europe, many rural destinations have successfully used community-based approaches to create attractive tourism experiences while supporting local development.

Portugal: Aldeias do Xisto
The Aldeias do Xisto (Schist Villages) network brings together a group of rural villages in central Portugal that have worked collectively to preserve traditional architecture, local culture, gastronomy, and crafts (Aldeias do Xisto, n.d.). Tourism development is closely linked to community participation and local entrepreneurship. Visitors can explore heritage trails, participate in cultural events, and engage with local producers, helping to generate economic opportunities while preserving rural identity



Italy: The Albergo Diffuso Model

The Albergo Diffuso ("scattered hotel") model was developed to revitalise small villages experiencing depopulation. Instead of building new hotels, accommodation is distributed across existing village houses and buildings (Associazione Nazionale Alberghi Diffusi, n.d.). Local residents play an active role in hosting visitors and providing services, creating economic benefits throughout the community while preserving local heritage and architecture.



Spain: Rural Tourism Cooperatives

In several regions of Spain, tourism cooperatives bring together local businesses, guides, farmers, artisans, and community organisations to develop and promote tourism experiences collaboratively. These cooperatives help small rural enterprises share resources, reach wider markets, preserve local traditions, and create integrated visitor experiences that benefit the wider community. Many are also involved in environmental education, heritage conservation, and the promotion of traditional rural lifestyles (CECOP, n.d.).



Romania: Maramureș Community Tourism

The Maramureș region is known for its traditional villages, wooden churches, crafts, and agricultural heritage. Community-based tourism initiatives encourage visitors to stay with local families, experience traditional rural lifestyles, and participate in cultural activities. These initiatives help preserve local customs while providing income opportunities for rural households (Romania Travel, n.d.).

These examples demonstrate that community-based tourism can take different forms depending on local circumstances. However, they all share a common goal: creating tourism experiences that benefit local communities while protecting the cultural and natural assets that make rural destinations unique.

Image 4: Maramures Community Tourism. Source: Photo by David Ancateu, on Pexels



4. PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Community-based tourism begins with understanding and valuing the resources that already exist within a community. Before designing tourism experiences, communities need to identify their strengths, engage local stakeholders, and develop activities that reflect local identity and culture. This section provides a practical framework that agro-tourism operators, community organisations, and rural entrepreneurs can use to create community-based tourism initiatives.

Step 1: Identify Community Assets

Every rural community possesses unique assets that can contribute to attractive tourism experiences. These assets may be cultural, natural, or social in nature. The first step in developing a community-based tourism initiative is to identify and document these resources.

Types of Community Assets

Cultural Assets	Natural Assets	Social Assets
Festivals and celebrations	Walking trails	Local associations
Traditional crafts	Rivers and lakes	Schools and training centres
Gastronomy and local products	Forests and natural parks	Cooperatives
Oral traditions and local stories	Farms and agricultural landscapes	Local producers
Historic buildings	Wildlife areas	Community groups
Music and dance traditions	Scenic viewpoints	Local volunteers

Practical Tips for Asset Identification

When identifying community assets, consider the following questions:

- What makes this community different from other rural destinations?
- Which traditions are still actively practised?
- What local products are unique to the area?
- Which natural features attract visitors?
- Who are the people with knowledge, skills, or stories to share?
- What events bring the community together?

Remember that valuable tourism assets are not always large attractions. A traditional bread-making workshop, a local beekeeper, or a village storyteller can often provide experiences that visitors remember long after their trip.

Community Asset Inventory Worksheet

Learners can use the following template to identify tourism resources within a community.

Asset Name	**Category**	**Description**	**Tourism Potential**	**Existing Challenges**
Example 1: Annual Harvest Festival	Cultural	Traditional celebration involving local food and music	High	Limited promotion
Example 2 :				
Example 3 :				

Good Practice

Try to involve local residents when creating the inventory. Community members often identify valuable assets that may be overlooked by external tourism planners.

Step 2: Map and Engage Stakeholders

Community-based tourism cannot succeed without collaboration. Once community assets have been identified, the next step is to determine who should be involved in developing and delivering tourism experiences.

Typical Community-Based Tourism Stakeholders

- Farmers and agricultural producers
- Accommodation providers
- Restaurants and cafés
- Artisans and craftspeople
- Local authorities
- Cultural associations
- Schools and educational institutions
- Tourism offices
- Environmental organisations
- Community volunteers

Stakeholder Mapping Exercise

Create a simple stakeholder map by placing the tourism project in the centre and identifying all individuals and organisations that may contribute to its success.

Questions to consider:

- Who owns or manages important community assets?
- Who can help promote tourism activities?
- Who benefits directly from tourism?
- Who might be affected by increased visitor numbers?
- Who has specialised knowledge or skills?

Stakeholder Engagement Checklist

- Identify key stakeholders
- Organise an initial meeting
- Gather ideas and expectations
- Define roles and responsibilities
- Establish communication channels
- Agree on shared objectives
- Schedule regular review meetings

Effective stakeholder engagement helps build trust and encourages long-term cooperation among community members.

Step 3: Design Community-Based Tourism Experiences

After identifying assets and stakeholders, the next step is to transform community resources into attractive visitor experiences.
Successful community-based tourism experiences should:

- Reflect local identity
- Encourage visitor participation
- Generate benefits for local people
- Respect local culture and traditions
- Be environmentally responsible

Example: "A Day in Rural Life"
Morning

- Guided farm visit
- Introduction to local agricultural practices

Midday

- Traditional cooking workshop using local ingredients

Afternoon

- Craft demonstration by local artisans

Evening

- Community dinner featuring regional recipes and storytelling

This type of experience allows visitors to engage directly with local residents while creating income opportunities for multiple stakeholders.

Experience Design Template

Element	Description
Experience Title	
Target Audience	
Main Activities	
Community Partners Involved	
Local Products Featured	
Sustainability Measures	
Estimated Duration	
Estimated Price	

Step 4: Build Partnerships and Tourism Networks

Community-based tourism works best when different organisations and businesses collaborate rather than operate independently.
Partnerships can help:

- Increase visibility
- Share resources
- Improve visitor experiences
- Create package offers
- Strengthen local economies

Examples of Local Partnerships
Farmer + Restaurant
Farm products supplied directly to local restaurants.
Farmer + Artisan
Visitors participate in farm activities followed by craft workshops.
Accommodation Provider + Producer
Guests receive farm visits and local product tastings as part of their stay.
Municipality + Community Groups
Joint organisation of festivals and tourism events.
Partnership Planning Table

Partner	Contribution	Expected Benefit

Strong partnerships ensure that tourism benefits are distributed across the community rather than concentrated among a few businesses.

Step 5: Create a Community Story and Visitor Narrative

Visitors are often attracted by stories rather than individual attractions. Community-based tourism should connect local assets through a coherent narrative.
Examples of tourism narratives include:

- "From Farm to Table"
- "The Story of Traditional Rural Life"
- "Discovering Local Crafts and Traditions"
- "A Journey Through Agricultural Heritage"

A good narrative helps visitors understand the connection between different activities and creates a more memorable experience.
Story Development Questions

- What is unique about this community?
- Which traditions define local identity?
- What stories do local residents tell?
- How can visitors participate rather than simply observe?

Step 6: Evaluate and Improve the Experience
Community-based tourism should evolve based on feedback from visitors and community members.

Evaluation Methods

- Visitor questionnaires
- Community meetings
- Online reviews
- Social media feedback
- Interviews with local stakeholders

Key Evaluation Questions
For Visitors:

- What was the most memorable part of the experience?
- What could be improved?
- Would you recommend the experience to others?

For Community Members:

- Are tourism activities generating benefits?
- Are local traditions being respected?
- Are there any negative impacts on the community?

Regular evaluation helps maintain quality, improve visitor satisfaction, and ensure that tourism continues to support community wellbeing.

Practical Checklist for Community-Based Tourism Development

Before launching a tourism initiative, confirm that you can answer "Yes" to the following questions:

- Have community assets been identified?
- Have key stakeholders been consulted?
- Are local residents actively involved?
- Are benefits shared fairly?
- Are environmental impacts considered?
- Is local culture respected?
- Is there a clear visitor experience?
- Is feedback collected and reviewed?

By following these steps, rural communities can develop tourism experiences that are authentic, sustainable, and beneficial for both visitors and local residents.



5. CASE STUDY

Case Study: Building a Community Agro-Tourism Network in the Douro Valley, Portugal

Background

The village of São Martinho (fictional name), located in the Douro Valley region of northern Portugal, has long depended on agriculture, particularly vineyard cultivation and wine production. Like many rural communities across Europe, the village has faced several challenges in recent years. Young people have increasingly moved to urban areas in search of education and employment opportunities, the local population has declined, and many traditional practices have become less visible in everyday life.

Although the Douro Valley attracts visitors due to its stunning landscapes and world-famous vineyards, tourists often visit only for a few hours before continuing their journey to larger destinations. As a result, local businesses benefit less from tourism than they could, and visitors have limited opportunities to experience the community's culture and traditions.

Recognising these challenges, community leaders, local businesses, and residents decided to work together to create a Community Agro-Tourism Network that would encourage visitors to stay longer, engage more deeply with local culture, and generate economic opportunities for the village.

Developing the Network

The first step was to identify local assets and stakeholders who could contribute to a community-based tourism experience. Several groups agreed to participate:

Vineyard Owners

Local vineyard owners opened their farms to visitors and developed guided tours explaining grape cultivation, traditional wine-making techniques, and the history of viticulture in the Douro region. Some vineyards also introduced seasonal activities such as grape harvesting experiences.

Local Craft Producers
Artisans specialising in pottery, weaving, embroidery, and traditional basket-making began offering workshops where visitors could learn about local craftsmanship and create their own souvenirs.

Traditional Restaurants
Local restaurants collaborated to create menus featuring regional products and traditional recipes. Visitors could participate in cooking demonstrations and learn about the connection between local gastronomy, agriculture, and cultural heritage.

The Local School
Teachers and students became actively involved in documenting local traditions, collecting oral histories from older residents, and helping to create visitor materials. Students also participated as guides during community events and festivals, gaining valuable communication and organisational skills.

Tourism Experience
Together, the partners developed a two-day agro-tourism experience called "Living the Douro Tradition."
The programme included:
Day 1

- Guided vineyard tour
- Wine tasting session
- Traditional lunch prepared with local ingredients
- Craft workshop with local artisans

Day 2

- Village heritage walk
- Storytelling session with local residents
- Traditional cooking demonstration
- Community market featuring local products

All activities were promoted under a common brand and marketed through social media, tourism websites, and regional tourism networks.

Results
After two tourism seasons, the community observed several positive outcomes.

Increased Visitor Stays
Many visitors who previously spent only a few hours in the area began staying overnight or extending their visits to participate in multiple activities. This increased spending in local businesses and accommodation providers.

New Income Streams
The tourism network created additional revenue opportunities for vineyard owners, artisans, restaurants, and local producers. Several participants reported that tourism had become an important supplementary source of income alongside their primary activities.

Greater Youth Engagement
The involvement of the local school encouraged young people to learn more about their community's traditions and heritage. Some students expressed interest in pursuing careers related to tourism, hospitality, or cultural management.

Preservation of Traditions
By incorporating local crafts, gastronomy, stories, and agricultural practices into tourism experiences, the community strengthened awareness of its cultural heritage and created incentives to preserve traditional knowledge.

Challenges Encountered
Despite its success, the project also faced several challenges:

- Coordinating schedules among multiple stakeholders.
- Ensuring consistent quality standards across different activities.
- Balancing visitor expectations with the daily routines of farmers and residents.
- Promoting the experience effectively with a limited marketing budget.
- Managing increased visitor numbers during peak tourism periods while preserving the village's authenticity.

The community addressed these challenges through regular meetings, shared planning, and the use of digital communication tools to improve coordination.

Lessons Learned
This case demonstrates that community-based tourism can create significant benefits when local stakeholders work together toward a shared goal. By combining agricultural activities, cultural heritage, education, and local entrepreneurship, rural communities can create authentic tourism experiences that support economic development while preserving their identity and traditions.

Reflection Questions

1. Which stakeholders played the most important role in the success of the agro-tourism network? Explain your answer.
2. What additional challenges might arise if visitor numbers continue to increase in the future?
3. How could digital tools such as social media platforms, Google My Maps, online booking systems, or digital storytelling applications help improve the project?
4. If you were part of this community, what additional activity or experience would you add to the tourism network?

How does this case study reflect the principles of community-based tourism discussed earlier in this module?

6. INTERACTIVE EXERCISE

Design a Community Agro-Tourism Experience
Objective
This practical activity allows learners to apply the concepts of community-based tourism by designing an agro-tourism experience that showcases local assets, involves community stakeholders, and promotes sustainable rural development.
Scenario
A rural community would like to attract more visitors while preserving its cultural heritage, supporting local businesses, and protecting its natural environment. The community has asked you to develop a community-based agro-tourism experience that highlights its unique identity and encourages visitor engagement.
Your task is to create a tourism experience using local cultural, natural, and community resources.
Instructions
Step 1: Choose a Rural Area
Select either:

- A real rural area in your country or region; or
- A fictional rural community created by your group.

Provide a brief description of the area, including:

- Location
- Main economic activities
- Cultural characteristics
- Natural features
- Existing tourism activities (if any)

Step 2: Identify Community Assets
Identify and map five community assets that could be included in a tourism experience.
Your selection must include:

- 2 Cultural Assets
- 2 Natural Assets
- 1 Community Asset

Complete the following table: Community Asset Inventory

Asset Name	Asset Type	Description	Tourism Potential

Step 3: Create a Visitor Route
Using your selected assets, design a visitor route that connects all five locations into a coherent tourism experience.
Your route should:

- Have a clear starting and ending point.
- Include activities at each stop.
- Encourage interaction with local people and traditions.
- Be realistic and easy for visitors to follow.

You may create the route using:

- A hand-drawn map
- Google My Maps
- ArcGIS StoryMaps

Step 4: Define Stakeholders
Identify the stakeholders who would be involved in developing and delivering the experience.
Examples include:

- Farmers
- Local producers
- Artisans
- Restaurant owners
- Accommodation providers
- Schools
- Cultural associations
- Municipal authorities
- Tourism organisations

Complete the table :
Stakeholder List

Stakeholder	Role in the Experience

Step 5:Develop the Visitor Experience
Create a short itinerary describing what visitors will do during the experience

Time	Activity	Location
09:00		
11:00		
13:00		
15:00		
17:00		

Visitor Narrative
Write a short paragraph (150–200 words) explaining the story that connects the selected assets.
Consider:

- What makes the area unique?
- What will visitors learn?
- How are local people involved?
- How does the experience reflect local identity and traditions?

Step 6: Sustainability Considerations
Community-based tourism should create benefits while protecting local resources and respecting community values.
Identify at least three sustainability measures that will be implemented as part of your tourism experience. Fill in the following table.

Sustainability Measure	Expected Benefit

Reflection Questions
After completing the activity, discuss the following questions:

1. Which community asset do you believe has the greatest tourism potential and why?
2. What challenges might arise when involving multiple stakeholders in the experience?
3. How could digital tools help promote and manage the tourism experience?
4. How does your proposed experience benefit both visitors and the local community?

7. DIGITAL TOOL

Google My Maps: Creating Interactive Community Tourism Routes

What is Google My Maps?

Google My Maps is a free online mapping tool that allows users to create customised maps by adding locations, routes, descriptions, images, and other information. It can be used by agro-tourism operators, local communities, and tourism organisations to showcase attractions and design interactive visitor experiences.

In community-based tourism, Google My Maps can help connect cultural, natural, and community assets into a single digital route that visitors can access before or during their trip. The tool is particularly useful for rural destinations because it is free, easy to use, and accessible on both computers and mobile devices.

Why Use Google My Maps?

Google My Maps offers several advantages for community-based tourism initiatives:

Free of Charge

The tool is available free of charge to anyone with a Google account, making it suitable for small businesses, community groups, and rural tourism operators with limited budgets.

Easy to Learn

No advanced technical skills are required. Users can quickly create maps, add locations, upload photos, and share information with visitors.

Suitable for Rural OperatorsGoogle My Maps allows communities to promote attractions that may not appear on traditional tourism maps, helping visitors discover local businesses, cultural sites, and hidden gems.

Creates Interactive Tourism Routes

Maps can combine multiple attractions into a single visitor experience, making it easier for tourists to navigate rural areas and explore local assets.

Practical Application in Community-Based Tourism

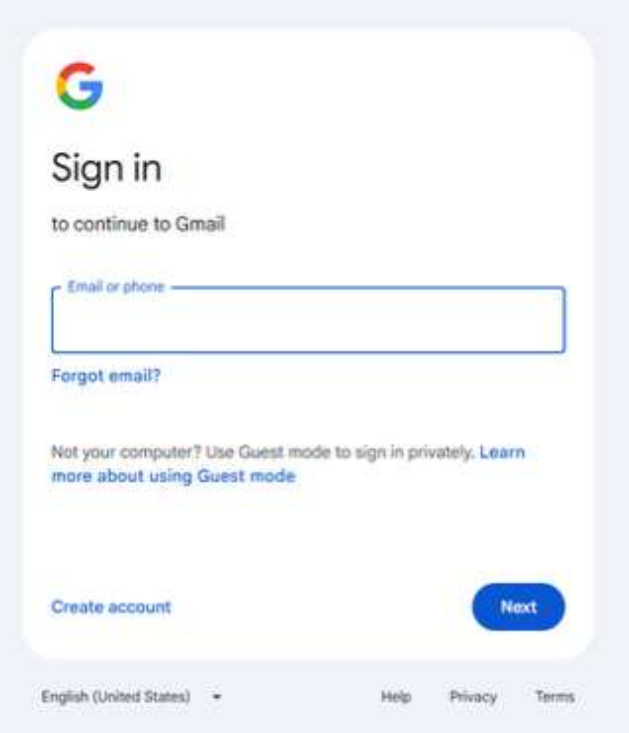
A community-based tourism network could use Google My Maps to create an interactive route that includes:

- Local farms and vineyards
- Traditional restaurants
- Craft workshops
- Heritage sites
- Walking trails
- Community centres
- Seasonal festivals and events

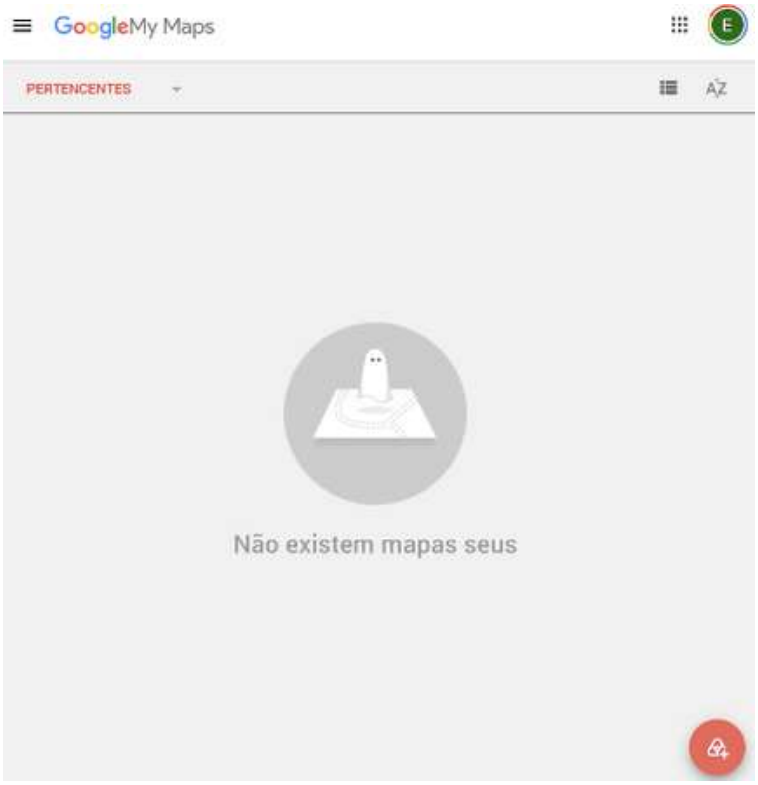
How to use it?

Step 1: Create or Log in to a Google Account

Visit Google and sign in using an existing Google account. If you do not have one, create a free account.



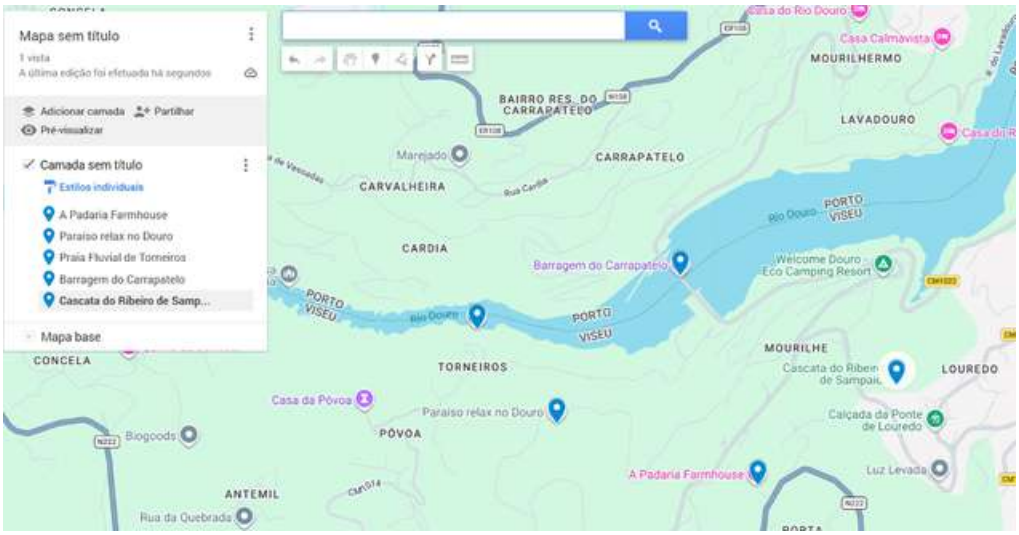
Step 2: Open Google My Maps
Go to Google My Maps (https://www.google.com/maps/d/) and select "Create a New Map."



Step 3: Add Community Assets
Search for locations or place markers manually on the map and then click on “Add to the map”.

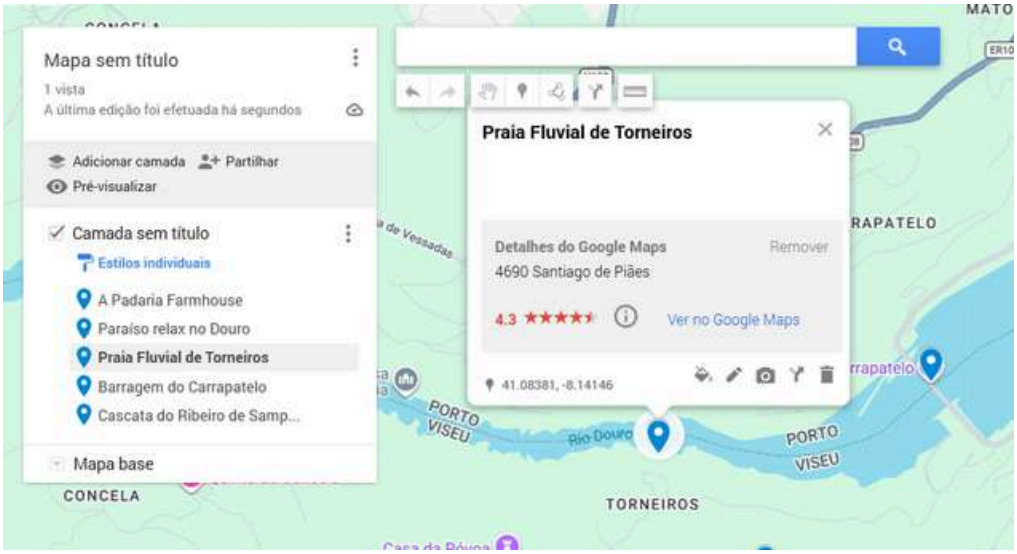
Examples include:

- A local farm
- A traditional restaurant
- A cultural heritage site
- A scenic viewpoint
- A community association

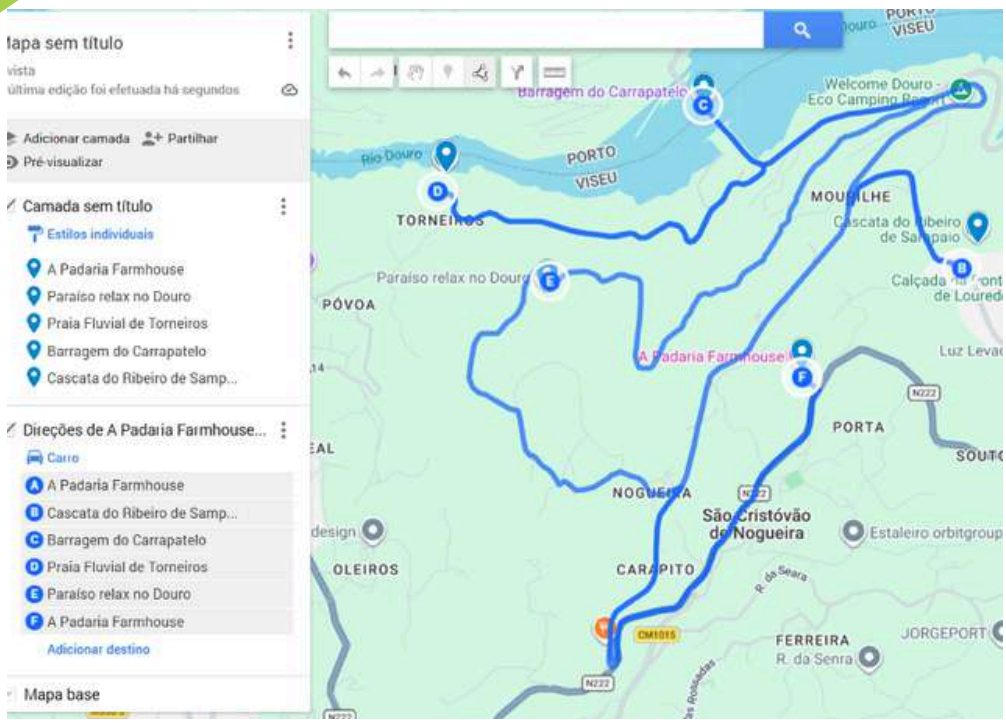


Step 4: Add Descriptions and Photos
For each location, add useful information such as:

- Description of the attraction
- Historical or cultural significance
- Visitor information
- Photographs
- Website or social media links



Step 5: Create a Visitor Route
Use the "Draw a line" tool in Google My Maps to connect the community assets and create a suggested visitor itinerary. You can choose a walking, cycling, driving, or custom route depending on the tourism experience

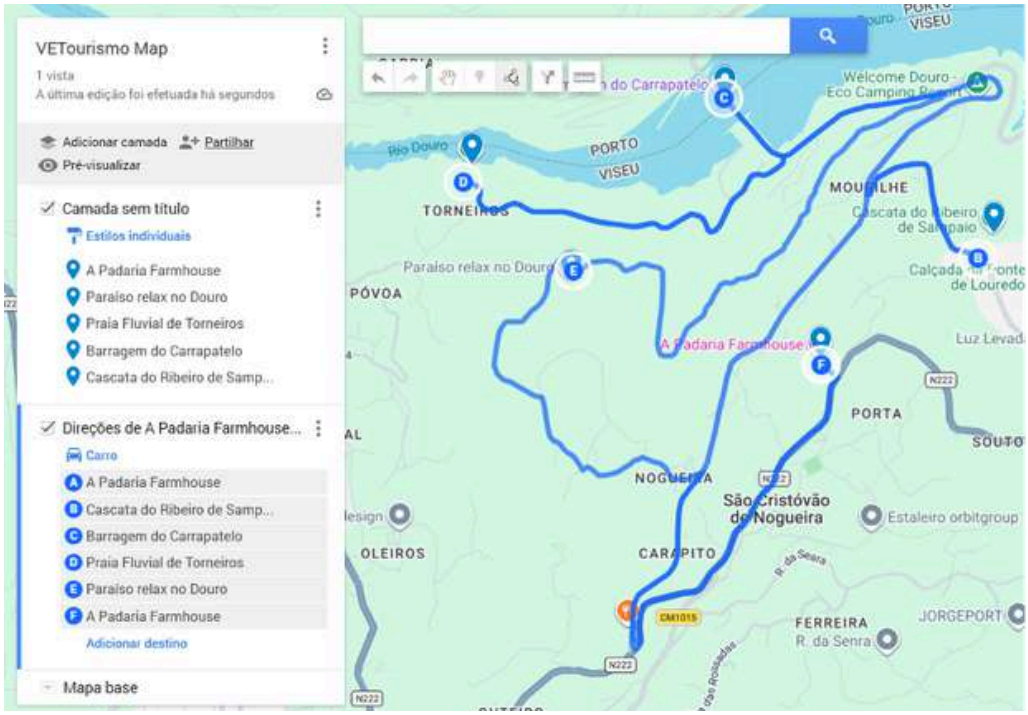


Step 6: Share the Map

Once completed, click on Share to obtain a link. The map can be shared through:

- Email
- Social media platforms
- Tourism websites
- QR codes

Visitors can access the map on their smartphones during their trip.



8. SUSTAINABILITY LINK

How Community-Based Tourism Supports Sustainability
Community-based tourism plays an important role in supporting sustainable rural development. By involving local people in tourism planning and activities, it helps ensure that economic benefits remain within the community while protecting cultural heritage and natural resources (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009).

Environmental Sustainability
Community-based tourism encourages visitors to consume local products and services, reducing the environmental impact associated with transporting goods over long distances. Many activities, such as walking tours, cycling routes, farm visits, and nature trails, have a relatively low environmental footprint. In addition, communities are often motivated to protect landscapes, biodiversity, and agricultural environments because these resources form the foundation of the visitor experience.

Social Sustainability
Local traditions, gastronomy, crafts, festivals, and cultural practices are valuable tourism assets. Community-based tourism helps preserve and promote this heritage by encouraging local participation and creating opportunities for residents to share their knowledge with visitors. It also strengthens community identity, fosters pride in local culture, and supports the transfer of traditional knowledge between generations.

Economic Sustainability
Tourism can provide additional income for farmers, artisans, local producers, restaurants, and accommodation providers. Because community-based tourism relies on local partnerships and services, a larger share of tourism revenue remains within the destination. This supports small businesses, creates employment opportunities, and contributes to the long-term resilience of rural economies.

Supporting Sustainable Rural Development
Community-based tourism contributes to sustainable rural development by balancing economic growth with environmental protection and social wellbeing. Recent OECD tourism policy analysis highlights the growing importance of managing tourism in ways that benefit local communities, protect natural and cultural resources, and create more resilient destinations (OECD, 2024). These principles are also aligned with the European Green Deal, which promotes sustainable consumption, resource efficiency, biodiversity protection, and stronger rural communities across Europe.

Key Message
Community-based tourism demonstrates that tourism can be a tool for positive change. When local communities actively participate in tourism development, they can protect their cultural and natural heritage, strengthen their economy, and create meaningful experiences for visitors while ensuring that the benefits of tourism are shared more widely.

Reflection
Think about an agro-tourism destination you know. How does it contribute to environmental, social, and economic sustainability? Can you identify one example for each of these three dimensions?

9. KEY TAKEAWAYS

Community-based tourism offers a practical approach to developing authentic and sustainable agro-tourism experiences that benefit both visitors and local communities. By involving residents, businesses, and local organisations in tourism planning and delivery, rural destinations can create unique experiences while supporting local development.

The key lessons from this module are:

- Community participation creates stronger tourism products by incorporating local knowledge, traditions, and experiences.
- Local assets are often the most valuable tourism resources, including cultural heritage, gastronomy, natural landscapes, and community traditions.
- Partnerships and collaboration between stakeholders help create more resilient, innovative, and attractive tourism experiences.
- Ethical tourism practices ensure that tourism development respects local culture, supports community wellbeing, and generates shared benefits.
- Digital tools, such as Google My Maps, can help promote local attractions, improve visitor experiences, and increase the visibility of rural destinations.

Recommendations for Practice

1. Engage local stakeholders from the beginning of the planning process.
2. Build tourism experiences around authentic local assets and traditions.
3. Encourage cooperation between businesses, community groups, and public institutions.
4. Consider environmental, social, and economic impacts when developing tourism activities.
5. Use digital tools to map, promote, and communicate community-based tourism experiences effectively.

10. ASSESSMENT

Mini Project: Practical Assignment
Design a Mini Community-Based Agro-Tourism Experience
Choose a real or fictional rural area and develop a short proposal for a community-based agro-tourism experience.

Your proposal should include:

- A brief description of the rural area.
- Two cultural assets and two natural assets.
- At least one community stakeholder involved in the experience.
- A simple visitor itinerary (3–5 activities).
- One sustainability measure.
- One digital tool that could be used to promote or manage the experience.

Fill in the table provided and make a short presentation to present your proposal.

Brief description of the rural area	
Cultural asset 1:	
Cultural asset 2:	
Natural asset 1:	
Natural asset 2:	
Community stakeholder:	
Visitor itinerary	
Sustainability measure:	
Digital tool to promote the experience:	

10. ASSESSMENT

Competence Achievement / Evaluation Criteria

Learners successfully complete the assessment when they are able to:

□ Describe a rural area suitable for community-based agro-tourism.

□ Identify cultural and natural assets that enhance the visitor experience.

□ Demonstrate how local stakeholders contribute to tourism development.

□ Design a realistic and sustainable visitor itinerary.

□ Integrate at least one sustainability measure into the proposal.

□ Select an appropriate digital tool to support promotion or visitor engagement.

□ Explain how the proposed experience benefits both visitors and the local community.

□ Present the proposal clearly and logically.

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Digital tool and screenshots: Google My Maps: https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/



VETourismo

MODULE 4.2

COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM

VETourismo

ADVANCING DIGITAL AND SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN AGRO-TOURISM FOR VETS

Project Number: 2025-1-DE02-KA220-VET-000361332

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Sub-module	Video title	Link
1.1	Sustainable Agro-Tourism	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cP3NEQ5n7Mk
1.2	Environmental Stewardship	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5UeDO8V9JNg
2.1	Digital Marketing	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5xTGVPYqIGM
2.2	Smart Technologies	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=szBGbBD_9bU
3.1	Entrepreneurship	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFbHzQVr12k
3.2	Customer Experience & Business Development	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Blk-iynVzDk
4.1	Local Identity & Gastronomy	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QR0kAz00Jyw
4.2	Community-Based Tourism	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U7qLUBL37y0

Annex I – Video Resources QR

1.1 Sustainable Agro-Tourism



1.2 Environmental Stewardship



2.1 Digital Marketing



2.2 Smart Technologies



3.1 Entrepreneurship



3.2 Customer Experience & Business Development



4.1 Local Identity & Gastronomy



4.2 Community-Based Tourism





VETourismo

CURRICULUM

VETourismo

ADVANCING DIGITAL AND SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN AGRO-TOURISM FOR VETS

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