

## **BARRIERS AND FACTORS SUPPORTING AGRITOURISM AND ECO-AGRITOURISM ACTIVITIES IN THE BUG VALLEY MUNICIPALITIES IN THE OPINION OF FARM OWNERS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The objective of the study was to present the barriers as well as factors which, in the opinion of farm owners inhabiting the Bug valley municipalities of the three voivodeships (Lubelskie, Podlaskie and Mazowieckie) support the agritourism and eco-agritourism activities. The result of the survey carried out amongst 99 farm owners, is, among others, a conclusion that from amongst the many barriers in the development of rural tourism, the lack of habit of weekend leisure in potential tourists is the most significant one, whilst the time-consuming and expensive process of transforming the farms into ecological farms, disproportionate towards the profitability of venture is the factor which limits the creation of eco-agritourism farms to the greatest extent. Natural values, quietness and peace prevailing in the vicinity of such farms are the factors which support the development of such activities above all.

**Key words:** agritourism, eco-agritourism, conventional farms, ecological farms, Bug valley

**JEL codes:** Q01, Z32

### **INTRODUCTION**

The growing speed of life and the need to take some active rest, away from the city hustle, in quietness, in the bounty of nature, as well as the increasing expectations concerning food products, their origins and quality, stand behind the choices made by tourists in favour of the offer presented by rural tourism. The areas in direct vicinity of the Bug valley are in majority of non-industrial character. These areas are characterized by a diverse degree of anthropogenization related to, above all, agricultural human activity. Agricultural lands occupy on average 64.4% of total area in the Bug valley municipalities. High share of agricultural lands and farmers accompanied by relatively beneficial conditions for agricultural production have made agriculture one of the most important sector of local economy here. There

are no major industrial centres in the territory of the Bug valley, which makes these areas relatively clean.

The relief of individual sections of river is quite diverse and within its entire border section – unregulated and strongly meandering. It forms part of the pan-European ecological corridor. These factors as well as the unique, diverse landscape of the valley create huge agritourism potential in this area. An additional advantage of the Bug valley areas is the fact that on the Polish side, they are in vast majority subject to legal protection. The areas of the valley comprise four landscape parks (Strzelecki, Sobiborski, Podlaski Przełom Bugu and Nadbużański), eight areas of protected landscape (Dołhobyczowski, three Nadbużańskie, Grabowiecko-Strzelecki, Poleski, Dolina Bugu and Dolina Bugu i Nurca). Almost entire area of the Bug valley is protected under Natura

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2000<sup>1</sup>. The Bug valley and, above all, its lower section is thanks to this intensively explored by tourists [Wojciechowski et al. 2002, Bernat 2010, Mocior 2014].

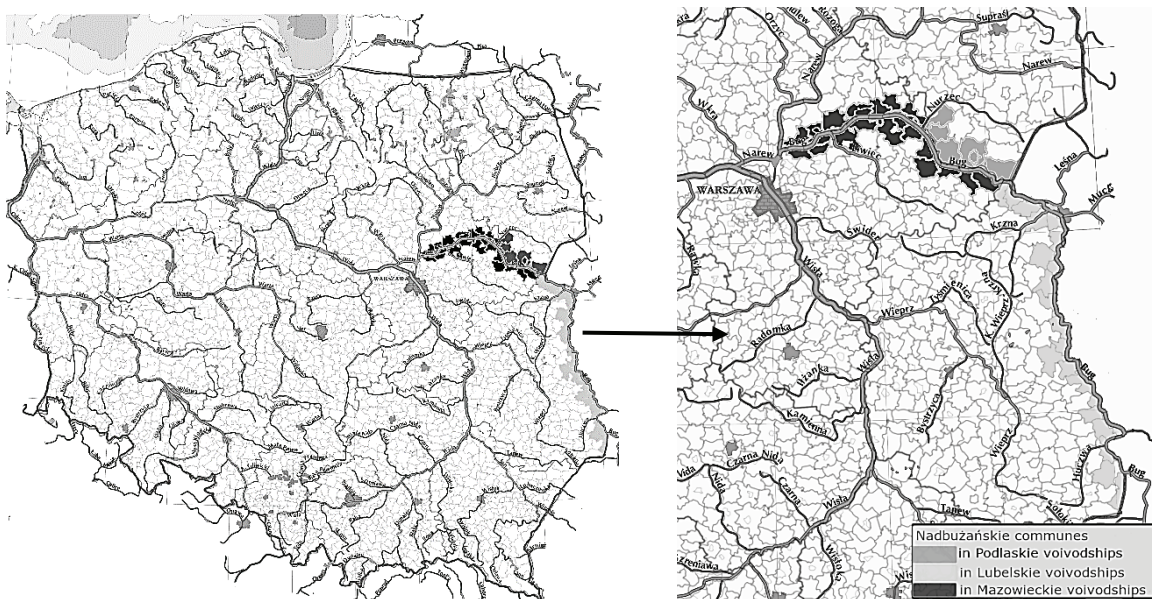
Within the protected areas, due to the idea of sustainable growth, ecological farming, which thanks to the so called good farming practices allows to use the creative potential of the area while preserving biological balance in the natural environment to the greatest possible degree, is perceived as a significant direction of development [Haas et al. 2000, Szałda 2002, Żelezik 2009]. Contrary to conventional agriculture, ecological agriculture does not cause eutrophication of ground waters and does not pollute the ground waters, not triggering exhaustion of soils nor its salinity. Researches prove also that both the state of environment, soils as well as ground waters are improved as a result of the introduction of ecological system of farming [Hass et al. 2000, Szałda 2002, Tyburski and Żakowska-Biemans 2007, Żelezik 2009].

Rural areas are also related to the specific form of leisure – agritourism, which is based on closeness to na-

ture, especially in areas with unique natural and cultural values and accommodation in active agricultural farms. If such a farm applies ecological farming system (and a given farm holds „Ekoland”<sup>2</sup> certificate or is in the course of transforming into ecological farm) it obtains the title of ego-agritourism farm [Zareba 2006]. Rural tourism is becoming more and more popular, especially among the inhabitants of urban agglomerations. The attractiveness of the offer is increased by the location of the farm in environmentally valuable areas [Zawadka 2007, Zawadka and Pietrzak 2016]. Within the Bug valley municipalities there are ideal natural conditions for the creation of such farms or they should be the stimuli for greening of the existing agritourism farms.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The aim of the work is to analyze and evaluate the barriers and benefits of agritourism and eco-tourism in the Bug river municipalities (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1.** The Bug river municipalities of voivodeships: Podlaskie, Lubelskie and Mazowieckie

Source: Own elaboration.

<sup>1</sup> The European Ecological Network Natura 2000 is the youngest legal form of protection of nature in Poland, which is targeted at preserving specific types of natural habitats and species of plants and animals which are considered to be valuable (significant for preservation of natural heritage of Europe) and threatened with extinction on the European scale.

<sup>2</sup> Association of producers of foodstuffs via ecological methods, belonging to the International Federation of Ecological Farming (IFOAM).

Empirical research was carried out in summer months of 2018 in the area of three voivodeships (Lubelskie, Podlaskie, Mazowieckie) including 12 powiats and 34 municipalities located in the Bug valley, in the area of Poland.

The method of diagnostic survey was used for the conduct of research, in the framework of which an online interview survey questionnaire was elaborated. Selection of research sample was of targeted character. The amount of 99 agritourism farm owners participated in it (including 76 whose farms were considered as conventional and 23 who run their farms in ecological system, or were in the process of transforming conventional farms into ecological ones). All the farms were located in the Bug valley municipalities. These researches were anonymous and their results were used solely for scientific purposes.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

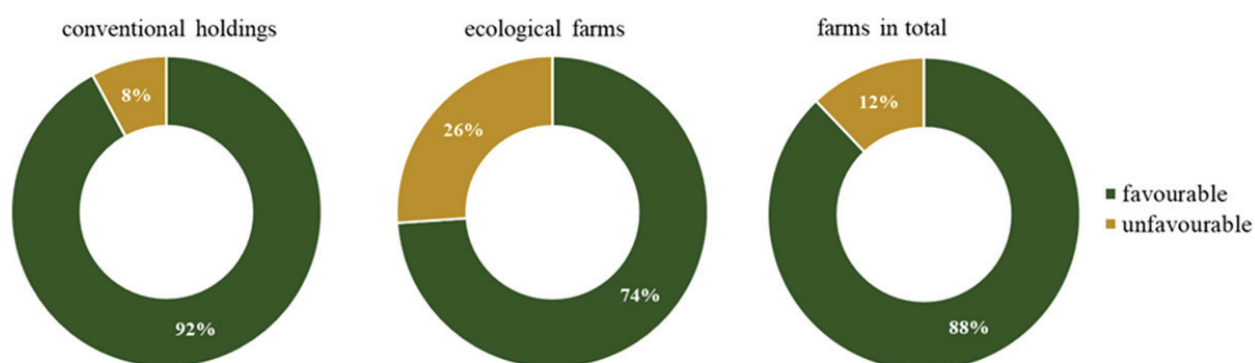
In the opinion of the majority of agritourism farm owners (almost 88% – Fig. 2) in the Bug valley municipalities there are beneficial conditions for agritourism development in their place of residence.

In the opinion of respondents running the farms, the greatest assets which have a positive impact on the development of agritourism in the region are, above all, natural values and quietness and peace prevailing in the vicinity, allowing for a good rest (Fig. 3). Similar conclusions were reached by Zawadka [2010], who showed a very strong positive correlation in the area of

Lubelskie Voivodeship ( $r = 0.80$ ) between the tourist attractiveness of the commune and the level of development of agritourism in its area. Also in the opinion of tourists, the most important reason for choosing nature-value areas is the possibility of rest in a quiet and peaceful place and contact with nature [Zawadka 2012, Zawadka and Pietrzak 2016].

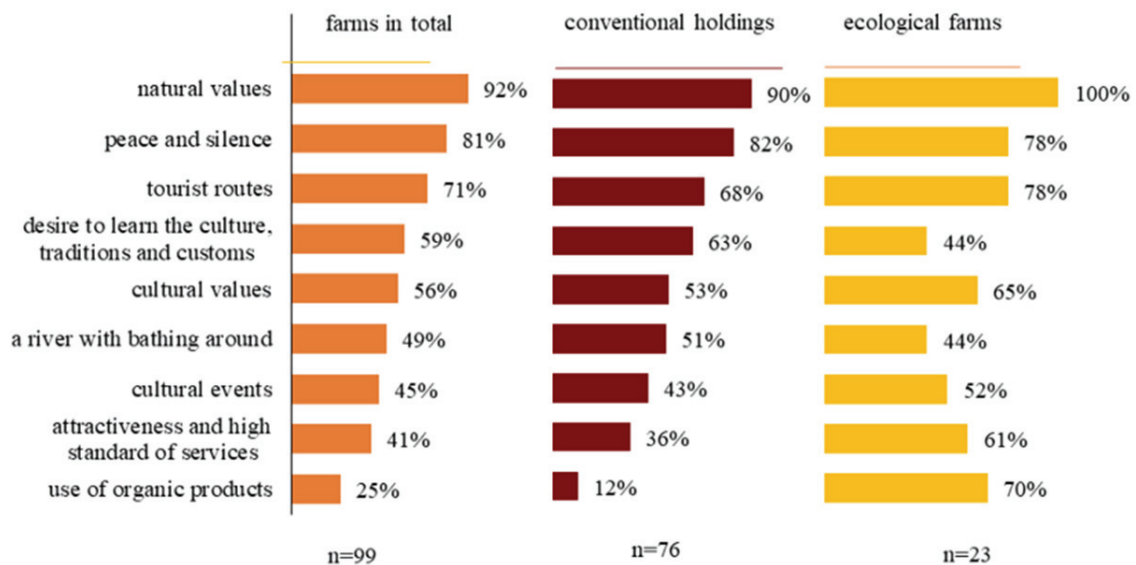
Significant, in the opinion of the surveyed farm owners, is also the expanded network of tourist trails. Ecological farm owners indicate also the will to use ecological products by the tourists and attractiveness and high standard of services, which for the owners of conventional farms is less important (Fig. 3).

All survey participants were asked also about the actions which contribute to increasing popularity of tourism in their region (Fig. 4). According to almost 90% of the respondents (both the owners of the researched conventional farms and ecological ones), adequate tourism information is critical (such which effectively reaches the potential tourists). The interest in promoting tourism in the region is raised by advertising materials (including Internet) which present the values of the region and encouraging tourists to visit this area. An important factor is also the offer of farms and the services related to tourism – in the opinion of respondents, tourists appreciate their high quality and attractiveness. Ecological farm owners consider modernization and lighting systems of roads as significant actions (65% of survey participants) as well as increasing service-commercial offer and gastronomy offer (57% of survey participants). The fact of selecting



**Fig. 2.** Assessment of conditions for the development of agritourism in the place of residence, in the opinion of the owners of the agritourism farms

Source: Own elaboration.



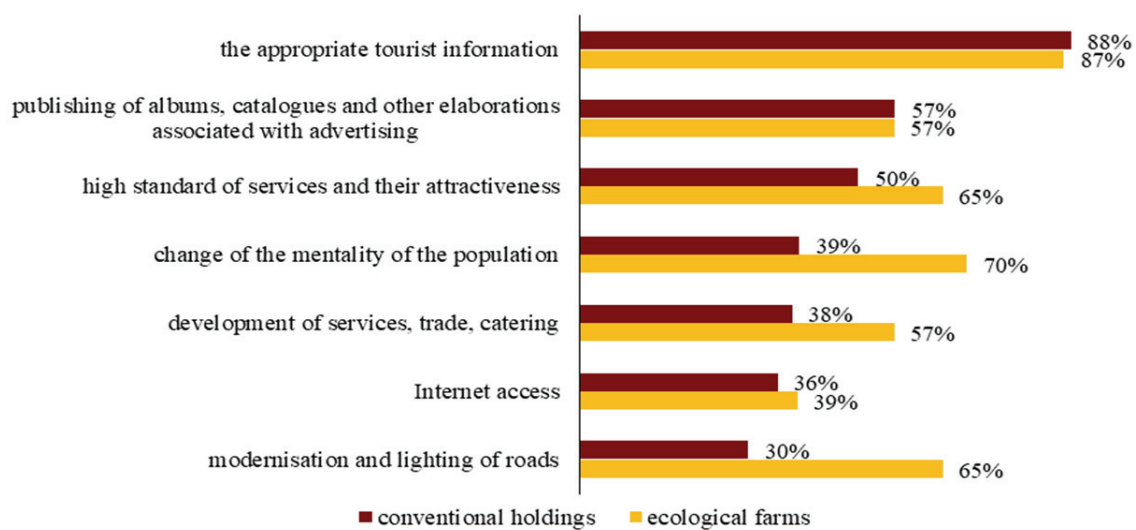
**Fig. 3.** The factors having a positive impact on the development of agritourism in the region, in the opinion of the owners of the farms

Source: Own elaboration.

these tasks may stem from the location of ecological farms away from the main towns and cities (Fig. 4).

According to the owners of conventional farms (70% of the surveyed), the factor that most restricts the development of rural tourism is the low popularity of weekend holidays in agritourism farms. Significant obstacle might be still low popularity of this form of

rest, as well as seasonal nature of the offers in majority (Fig. 5). Owners of ecological farms are of different opinion, for whom the factors which play the largest role in limiting development of agritourism are related to insufficient information and advertisement, as well as lack of adequate technical infrastructure in the municipality (in both cases the replies were granted



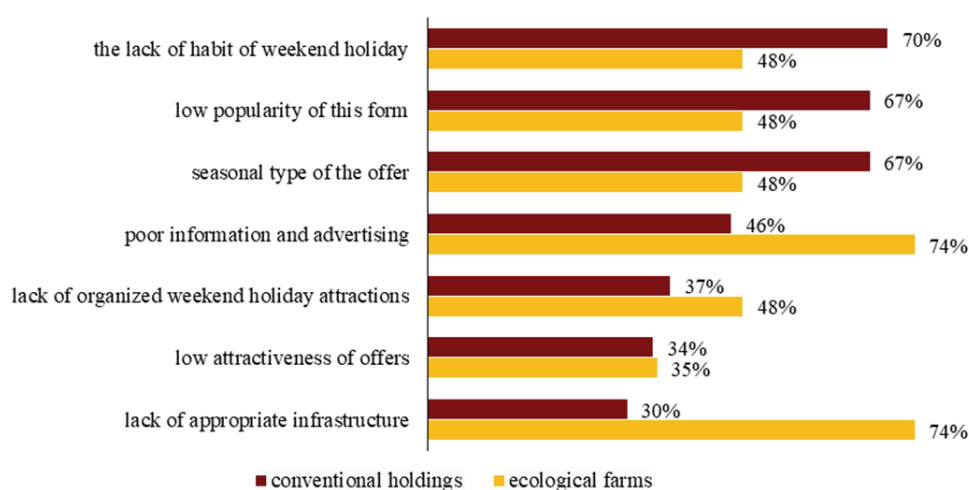
**Fig. 4.** Actions contributing to the increase of popularity of tourism in the region, in the opinion of the owners of the farms

Source: Own elaboration.

by 74% of survey participants) – Figure 5. It is the underdeveloped technical infrastructure in rural areas that constitutes one of the most important barriers to multifunctional development of rural areas, lowers the standard of living and management, and decides that this area is not attractive for investors [Sikorska-Wolak 2010].

In both groups (both ecological and conventional farms' owners) the survey participants, when asked about the causes of not carrying out actions targeted at

increasing the level of greening of agritourism farms, most frequently indicated excess of preparatory actions and control actions which are related to certification as well as a greater workload related to the conduct of an ecological farm (Fig. 6). The causes which in the opinion of ecological farm owners are significant are the financial issues that is lack of funds for transforming and maintaining ecological farms (52%) as well as low profitability of same while at the same time incurring large expenditure (52%). The respondents running



**Fig. 5.** Factors limiting development of agritourism in the opinion of the owners of the agrotouristic farms  
Source: Own elaboration.



**Fig. 6.** The reasons for which the actions increasing the level of greening of agrotouristic farms, in the opinion of the respondents are not implemented  
Source: Own elaboration.

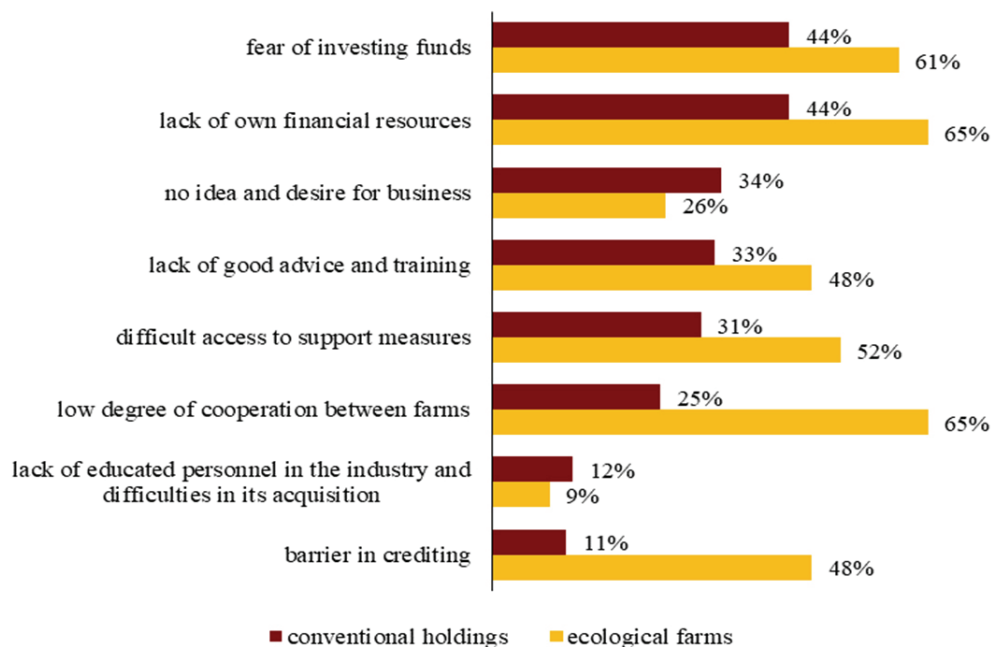
conventional farms justify the low level of greening due to lack of specialist knowledge in the area of ecological farming (46%) and small interest on the side of tourists in this type of offer (33%) – Figure 6.

The respondents were asked also about the factors which in their opinion were the most significant barriers for the development of eco-agritourism activities (Fig. 7). The most significant problem for both groups was the financial issue – both lack of own financial means and, in case of ecological farms – limit in the access to loans. Furthermore, fear of investing finan-

cial means and the related risk of failure was for both groups of great importance.

Owners of ecological farms indicate as an additional obstacle frequently low level of cooperation between the farms and a difficult access to aid measures as well as lack of thematic trainings (Fig. 7). An attempt was made in the course of research to verify the greatest, in the opinion of ecological farm owners, benefits resulting from organic activity in a farm (Fig. 8).

The respondents considered the aspects related to environment protection as the most significant ones.



**Fig. 7.** Factors limiting development of eco-agritourism in the opinion of the owners of agritourism farms  
Source: Own elaboration.



**Fig. 8.** Benefits resulting from organic activity in a farm in the opinion of the owners of the ecoagritouristic farms  
Source: Own elaboration.

The vast majority (91%) also values the improvement of health-related values of food products produced in ecological farms and considers carrying out ecological activity as positively impacting the attractiveness of agritourism offer (83% of respondents). More than half of the survey participants noted that an advantage of ecological farm is a higher price of ecological products in comparison to the products originating from conventional farms, however, relatively few respondents (35%) thought that obtaining surcharges stemming from the title of carrying out ecological activity (from the European Union's funds under technical assistance of the Programme of Development of Rural Areas – direct surcharges and agricultural-environmental-climate surcharges) is an advantage (Fig. 8).

## CONCLUSIONS

The Bug valley is characterized by unique natural values. Very good agricultural conditions also prevail within this area. In the opinion of the vast majority of surveyed farm owners, there are beneficial conditions for the development of agritourism within this area. The dominating advantage of the region, impacting the development of agritourism and perfectly fitting into its climate are, according to the respondents, the beauty of nature and the omnipresent in the Bug valley terrains quaintness and peace. The greatest significance in promotion of tourism is assigned to tourist information and advertising materials (include Internet) promoting the region.

Lack of habit of weekend trips in a agritourism farm as well as seasonability of the offer are, according to the survey participants, the key causes of lack of development of this type of tourism. Greening of the farms is limited within the area which, in the opinion of the respondents, is caused by time-consumption of the process of transformation of this type of farms and the later control related to this process. Eco-agritourism farms, according to the survey participants, are a risky venture and not a very profitable one. The owners of eco-agritourism farms consider environment protection and improvement of the quality of food products originating from ecological production to be the benefits stemming from the conduct of ecological activity.

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## **BARIERY I CZYNNIKI SPRZYJAJĄCE AGROTURYSTYCZNEJ ORAZ EKOAGROTURYSTYCZNEJ DZIAŁALNOŚCI W GMINACH NADBUŻAŃSKICH W OPINIACH WŁAŚCICIELI GOSPODARSTW**

### **STRESZCZENIE**

Celem pracy było przedstawienie barier oraz czynników, które w opiniach właścicieli gospodarstw położonych na terenie gmin nadbużańskich trzech województw (lubelskiego, podlaskiego i mazowieckiego) sprzyjają agroturystycznej i ekoagroturystycznej działalności. Rezultatem badań ankietowych, przeprowadzonych wśród 99 właścicieli gospodarstw, jest m.in. wniosek, że wśród barier rozwoju turystyki wiejskiej najważniejszą jest brak nawyku wypoczynku weekendowego potencjalnych turystów, a czynnikiem w największym stopniu ograniczającym powstawanie gospodarstw ekoagroturystycznych jest pracochłonny i kosztochłonny proces przestawienia gospodarstwa na ekologiczne, niewspółmierny do opłacalności przedsięwzięcia. Czynnikiem sprzyjającym rozwój takiej działalności są przede wszystkim walory przyrodnicze oraz cisza i spokój panujące w okolicy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** agroturystyka, ekoagroturystyka, gospodarstwa konwencjonalne, gospodarstwa ekologiczne, dolina rzeki Bug