

Research Article

# Unregistered Agritourism Farms and Their Economic Implications: A Case Study from Iloilo, Philippines

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## Abstract

The growing urban interest in connecting with the land and engaging in rural experiences has led to the rise of agritourism. However, in Alimodian, where agriculture remains a primary livelihood, some farms remain unregistered despite their agritourism potential. This study investigates the factors contributing to the non-registration of agritourism farms, focusing on Dongmer Tillers Trail and Boglosa Vista Farm. Using a qualitative, interview-based case study design, the research found that complex registration procedures and associated costs discourage farm owners from completing the process. Additionally, municipal requirements—though necessary for business legitimacy—pose challenges depending on the farm's nature and available resources. Family support emerged as a vital factor influencing the sustainability of these unregistered farms. The study highlights the need for streamlined registration processes and enhanced local government support to formalize agritourism enterprises and promote inclusive rural development.

## Keywords

Agritourism Farm, Farm Requirements, Unregistered Farm, Case Study, Interview, Strategic Approach, Agripreneur, Farm Resilience

## 1. Introduction

According to Hall & Jenkins [1], agritourism farms arise in response to the growing interest among urban and suburban populations in engaging with the land, learning where their food comes from, and enjoying the charm of rural settings. Agritourism enables visitors to participate in direct farming tasks such as crop harvesting, animal care, and learning about sustainable farming practices. Beyond farming, these sites offer immersive recreational opportunities such as fruit and vegetable picking, camping, hiking, fishing, and planting.

Other common activities include guided farm tours, bird watching, horseback riding, agricultural crafts, bicycling, school excursions, wildlife photography, pumpkin patches, corn mazes, wagon rides, farm-to-table dinners, and overnight farm stays. Agritourism therefore plays a multifaceted role: it entertains visitors, provides educational experiences, promotes farming culture, and underscores the essential contribution of agriculture to community life.

In the hills of Southwest Central Iloilo lies the Municipality

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of Alimodian, a location renowned for its natural beauty and hospitality [2]. Agritourism destinations such as Dong-Mers Tiller's Trail in Barangay Binalud and Boglosa Vista Farm demonstrate the potential of farm-based tourism to provide both social and economic value. Dong-Mers Tiller's Trail, which began operating in 2021, offers overnight accommodations, camping activities, hiking opportunities, and the sale of freshly picked fruits and vegetables. Its affordability and accessibility make it appealing to families, students, and groups seeking a respite from urban pressures. Similarly, Boglosa Vista Farm, established in 2022, provides nature-based experiences such as hiking and ATV rides, alongside food services and small-scale livestock production. Visitors enjoy the calming landscape while supporting local livelihoods. These case examples illustrate how agritourism ventures, even when unregistered, meet growing recreational demands and generate supplementary income for rural households [17].

Despite these benefits, many agritourism farms remain unregistered. The persistence of informality reflects larger issues within the regulatory environment. High compliance costs, multiple bureaucratic steps, and limited awareness often dissuade operators from pursuing formal registration. The goal of this study is therefore to investigate why such farms continue to operate outside formal structures and to assess their implications for the local economy. Understanding this dynamic is crucial, as informality affects not only taxation and safety regulation but also the sustainability and visibility of agritourism as a development strategy.

The study is framed within Social Constructionism, a perspective that emphasizes the role of culture and context in shaping meaning [3]. Social constructionism views knowledge as socially produced, contingent on shared assumptions and community consensus rather than universal truths [27]. Vinney [4] explains that many aspects considered "real" in society are products of social construction and evolve with cultural change [22], and [27]. Within this framework, perceptions of registration, compliance, and resilience among agritourism operators can be interpreted as socially constructed. Barnett [5] further suggests that learning emerges through interaction and the creation of meaning, which in this study is achieved through participants' narratives during interviews. Similarly, interpretivist approaches emphasize subjective understandings. Dudovski [6] argues that interpretivism prioritizes meaning over objectivity, while Farrow et al. [7] add that it seeks to generate understanding rather than universal truths Farrow et al [14]. This lens is particularly appropriate for exploring unregistered agritourism farms, as it focuses on lived experiences and localized interpretations.

At the micro level, the study draws on Hayes' [8] theory of Barriers to Entry, which explains how financial, legal, and procedural obstacles restrict new entrants from formal market participation. In the context of agritourism, these barriers include the cost of documentary requirements, licensing fees,

and regulatory clearances. Such conditions encourage informality as a rational coping strategy.

The study also adopts the Theory of Change [9], which outlines how change occurs in tourism systems by analyzing problems, identifying solutions, and designing interventions [25]. Applied here, the theory clarifies how informal agritourism operations might transition toward formalization, ensuring that their contributions to community development are maximized.

Thus, the study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) Why are some agritourism farms unregistered? (2) How do unregistered farms address the problems they encounter? and (3) What effects do unregistered agritourism farms have on the local economy? These questions anchor the inquiry in both theoretical and practical terms, highlighting the intersection of individual agency, institutional structures, and community development outcomes.

## 2. Methodology

The research utilized a qualitative case study design with semi-structured interviews as the primary tool [12]. Eight participants included owners of unregistered agritourism farms, the municipal tourism officer, and local officials. Purposive sampling was applied to identify respondents. In this qualitative case study, data saturation was reached when no new themes, insights, or patterns emerged from the interviews. A total of five in-depth interviews were conducted—two with owners of unregistered agritourism farms (Dong-Mers Tiller's Trail and Boglosa Vista Farm), one with a registered farm operator, and two with representatives from the Municipal Agriculture Office. After the fifth interview, participant responses began to repeat, particularly in describing difficulties related to the registration process, financial costs, and procedural complexity. The recurrence of these key points indicated that the data collected had become sufficient to address the study's objectives, signifying saturation.

Data collection involved interviews, on-site observations, and validation from the Business Licensing and Permit Office. To ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings, the study utilized both methodological and data triangulation. Methodological triangulation was carried out through the integration of several qualitative techniques, including semi-structured interviews, direct on-site observations, and document analysis of local government registration requirements and Department of Tourism accreditation procedures. Data triangulation, on the other hand, was achieved by comparing and validating the perspectives of different stakeholder groups—farm owners, registered operators, and municipal officials. This combination of sources and methods provided a comprehensive understanding of the barriers to registration and strengthened the trustworthiness of the study's conclusions [19]. Thematic analysis was used to code and identify recurring themes [8]. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, were observed.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The findings revealed several key barriers and insights:- Bureaucratic and financial challenges: Multiple requirements, costly compliance, and repetitive processes discourage registration [11]. Operational disadvantages: Unregistered farms cannot access endorsements, marketing, or employee benefits [7]. Community and family support: Despite lack of permits, family labor and community networks sustain farm operations. Economic contributions: Farms generate income through lodging, food, and recreational services, indirectly aiding the local economy [23]. - Risks of illegality: Operating without permits exposes farms to legal sanctions and reputational damage [15].

The main reason why the farms are not registered is due to difficulty in processing business permits, which can be done online or in person [1]. The first is to go to the barangay hall, where the business is formally registered, and turn in the necessary paperwork. You can obtain barangay clearance after you finish all the processes and payments. It does not end there. The next steps for business registration are registering the business name with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) for sole proprietorships or with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) for partnerships and corporations. Next, acquire clearance from the local barangay where your business will operate. Then, apply for a mayor's permit or business permit from the local government unit (LGU).

Registering with the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) for your Tin and comply with tax requirements. Open a bank account under your business name, and depending on the nature of the business, additional permits from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Department of Health (DOH), or the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) might be needed. Business licenses are not easy to obtain, and there are a lot of requirements to get them all. Aside from the agencies that you need to get your requirements from, there are also other requirements that they need, like zoning clearance, police clearance, sanitary/health clearance, occupancy permit, contract of lease, fire safety inspection certificate, and tax clearance [3]. However, these requirements are all necessary in order to operate a business, as they can also help ensure that businesses pay their taxes and adhere to safety standards. Companies who fail to register may be subject to penalties and other repercussions. For instance, if a company is discovered operating without a license, they may have to close. In some situations, if they obtain the license, they will be free to reopen or may be required to serve a mandated probationary period, or worse, the city may refuse to provide the license to the business. It is also the same for the hindrances in registering farms, and various locations offer diverse requirements for the business permit requirement. Because different areas of the municipality have different standards, the owners or the person who's processing have trouble registering their businesses.

Having a support system can greatly help business owners

[4]. Their business is also supported by their relatives, which is why they do not have a lot of financial problems. For the problem that they encounter, they have their own strategies to deal with the issue regarding their business. These show that you can share your ups and downs with the people that surround you and understand your hardships as a business owner. They also share the management that they do inside their business, which is that if the owner is good at cleaning and cooking, she can do it. If, there is something that she cannot do, the owner asks for help. As time went by, they discussed that she would be able to learn it along the way. It is important to have knowledge and experience when it comes to having a business to be successful, as expertise is key to success in any business [18]. It shows that the participants are lacking when it comes to experience however, she is not the only person who is working but also the relatives who support her. They are also experimenting with an approach that can impact the growth and success of a business to find what works best, which is trial and error.

These help the business owners to be able to know what decisions to make as they will already have a method, have analyzed the results, and can improve it more later on. It is a huge help to be open-minded, adaptable, and not afraid to change in response to the feedback of the customer.

By emphasizing the assets of the farm—livestock, fruit trees, and vegetable planting—farmers can increase income. They are able to earn extra money and save money as a result. Farm owners can sell the fruits and veggies to anybody who is interested in buying them. They have a wide range of products and crops that they can use in their daily lives, which is really practical since they can just have their organic stuff and not have to go outside. In addition to the animals, they also provide karaoke, corkage, entry fees, and other services to supplement their revenue.

### 4. Emerging Themes

This study revealed four dominant themes emerging from the experiences of unregistered agritourism farm operators: difficulties in processing business permits, hindrances in registration, farm resilience, and agripreneurship strategies. Together, these themes highlight the dynamic tension between regulatory burdens, entrepreneurial adaptation, and the institutional environment of agritourism in rural municipalities.

#### 4.1. Difficulty in Processing Business Permits

The difficulty in processing business permits emerged as the most consistent barrier to formalization. Respondents described the process as time-consuming, costly, and fragmented, often requiring multiple steps across agencies, including barangay clearance, municipal hall approval, fire safety inspection, BIR, and DTI registration. This aligns with Lumanauw, B., & Lolowang, I. R. A. [21] and Zoleta [28],

who emphasized the bureaucratic layers and documentary requirements that discourage compliance. Dimayuga [11] also highlighted the hybrid nature of online and in-person steps, which complicates rather than simplifies the experience. Similarly, Singer et al. [24], noted that licensing requirements often vary by location, creating inconsistencies that frustrate small operators. The findings demonstrate how the prohibitive nature of these requirements discourages operators from registering and pushes many to test their ventures informally before committing resources.

These bureaucratic burdens have far-reaching implications. On one hand, unregistered farms deprive local governments of revenue and oversight authority; on the other, operators themselves forfeit the benefits of legitimacy, such as access to financial institutions, legal protections, and inclusion in official tourism promotion. Thus, the regulatory design, rather than a lack of willingness, appears to be the main determinant of informality.

## 4.2. Beyond Procedural Barriers

Beyond procedural barriers, respondents acknowledged the social and economic motivations for registration. Many expressed a sense of duty to be ‘legal’ and recognized that registration improves credibility, enables tax contributions, and opens access to DOT accreditation [26]. Accreditation, in turn, ensures priority engagement and visibility, which are critical for building a market presence. However, as Listokin et al. [20] argued, compliance cannot be explained by legal obligation alone; it is mediated by the perceived fairness and accessibility of the system. While farmers are motivated by both legitimacy and the promise of benefits, the existing system undermines their intent by imposing excessive administrative and financial burdens.

Policy-wise, this suggests that streamlining procedures and coupling them with immediate, visible benefits could significantly increase formalization. For example, provisional permits with simplified requirements may encourage operators to register early, while tangible incentives—such as inclusion in municipal tourism maps or eligibility for small grants—reinforce the perceived value of registration.

## 4.3. Resilience of Unregistered Farm Operators

The findings underscore the resilience of unregistered farm operators, who often employ adaptive strategies despite their lack of formal support. Many rely on family labor, diversify their services, and adjust offerings seasonally, embodying a ‘trial-and-error’ approach to management. This echoes Griffis et al [16], who emphasized the role of social support in small enterprises, and Famutimi & Olugbamila [13], who noted the importance of expertise and skill-building in sustaining rural businesses. It also highlighted iterative adaptation as a defining characteristic of resilient enterprises. However, resilience in this context is fragile, as it lacks the scaffolding of

institutional backing, risk management tools, and financial buffers. The entrepreneurial creativity of operators allows them to survive, but not necessarily thrive, particularly in the face of shocks such as climate variability or market downturns.

To strengthen resilience, operators need access to targeted capacity-building programs. Training on basic financial management, demand forecasting, and digital marketing could professionalize practices and reduce inefficiencies. Moreover, peer learning networks or cooperatives can pool resources, share best practices, and enhance collective bargaining power, consistent with the support mechanisms Griffis [16] describes.

## 4.4. Agripreneurship

Agripreneurship emerged as a theme highlighting the creative ways operators monetize farm assets. Respondents described how scenic views, gardens, and agricultural produce were repackaged into marketable experiences, sometimes with additional services such as massage or pre-booked meals. This aligns with Francis [15] and Cling et al [9] who emphasized the strategic influence of owner actions in shaping enterprise success. Similarly, Marzan [23] argued that diversification of crops and outputs provides both resilience and opportunities for added value. The study shows that even without registration, operators engage in entrepreneurial experimentation, though often limited by scale, capital, and market knowledge.

Developing agripreneurial capacity requires structured training in product design, packaging experiences, and using digital platforms for marketing. By equipping operators with practical tools, their informal creativity can be translated into sustainable agritourism ventures.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that informality in agritourism is less a matter of unwillingness and more a rational response to structural barriers. Entrepreneurs balance the risks of compliance against the need to test business viability, leading to a cycle of partial or delayed registration. As noted by Marzan [23] and Velasco [26] accreditation offers tangible benefits, but only if operators can realistically access it. Administrative burdens [11, 24, 28] thus become pivotal in shaping behavioral outcomes.

The policy implications are clear: reduce friction in the registration process, provide phased pathways toward accreditation, and create capacity-building opportunities that transform resilience from trial-and-error into structured, sustainable growth. In doing so, local.

## 5. Conclusions

As farm becomes unregistered, certain aspects of them may have an impact on the local economy. For example, they are not able to be legitimately recommended to tourists by the Department of Tourism, the municipality, or certain travel

agencies. This absence of endorsement prevents them from leveraging the tourism sector to generate income for the Alimodian community. Moreover, the farms' unregistered status presents hurdles in their integration into the local economy. Employees working on these farms are deprived of legal entitlements to benefits from the Department of Labor and Employment, placing them at a disadvantage compared to their counterparts in registered establishments. Therefore, the researchers conclude that there are existing unregistered farms due to the requirements of the municipality that hinder their registration. These requirements not only involve the agencies, but they also have additional requirements as it also depends on the nature of the business. The needed requirements, however, are all necessary, for this is the standard for starting a business. Unregistered businesses are all considered illegal. It also showed that having family support has an impact on their lives since they support each other not just financially but also physically and mentally. Unregistered individuals have the drawback of not being able to receive municipal endorsements.

Unregistered agritourism farms provide livelihood opportunities, enhance rural tourism, and foster community support. However, the absence of registration prevents long-term sustainability, access to government programs, and official accreditation from the Department of Tourism [10]. Addressing bureaucratic barriers, reducing registration costs, and offering capacity-building initiatives could encourage compliance. Policy reforms and LGU support are crucial to help agripreneurs transition into registered enterprises, ensuring legal protection, sustainability, and alignment with national tourism development goals.

The findings of this study contribute to the broader goals of Philippine rural development and sustainable tourism by highlighting the need to integrate unregistered agritourism farms into formal development frameworks. The challenges identified—such as high registration costs, bureaucratic procedures, and limited institutional support—underscore policy gaps that hinder rural enterprises from contributing fully to local economic growth. By addressing these barriers, local government units (LGUs) and national agencies such as the Department of Tourism (DOT) and the Department of Agriculture (DA) can promote inclusive participation among small-scale farmers. Formal registration not only legitimizes operations but also provides access to training, financial assistance, and marketing opportunities aligned with the Philippine Development Plan and the National Tourism Development Plan's goals of rural inclusivity and sustainability. Moreover, incorporating unregistered farms into the formal tourism value chain supports environmental stewardship, community empowerment, and livelihood diversification—key pillars of sustainable tourism. Thus, the study provides actionable insights that can guide policymakers in designing localized interventions that bridge informality and sustainable rural enterprise development.

The results of this study suggest several policy directions to

strengthen the formalization and sustainability of agritourism enterprises in rural areas. First, local government units (LGUs) should simplify registration processes by creating a “one-stop shop” system that consolidates permits from multiple agencies, reducing both time and cost burdens on farm owners. Second, LGUs and the Department of Tourism (DOT) may implement incentive-based programs—such as tax discounts, technical support, and promotional inclusion—for farms that comply with registration and sustainability standards. Third, capacity-building initiatives should be expanded through the Department of Agriculture (DA) and Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) to train farmers in business management, environmental conservation, and tourism operations. Finally, collaboration between government, academe, and private sectors can foster knowledge sharing and innovation, ensuring that agritourism development remains aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those on decent work, responsible consumption, and rural resilience.

## Abbreviations

|       |                                                      |
|-------|------------------------------------------------------|
| BIR   | Bureau of Internal Revenue                           |
| DA    | Department of Agriculture                            |
| DENR  | Department of Environment and Natural Resources      |
| DOH   | Department of Health                                 |
| DOT   | Department of Tourism                                |
| DTI   | Department of Trade and Industry                     |
| FDA   | Food and Drug Administration                         |
| LGU   | Local Government Unit                                |
| SEC   | Security and Exchange Commission                     |
| SDGs  | Sustainable Development Goals                        |
| TESDA | Technical Education and Skills Development Authority |

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## Conflicts of Interest

The researchers declare that the research was conducted in

the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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