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**LINKING THE MEKONG DELTA REGION IN THE
DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE MODEL IN
COMBINATION WITH TOURISM*****Tu Minh Thien***Van Hien University**Email: thientm@vhu.edu.vn**Received: 13/06/22; Accepted: 06/07/2022***Abstract**

Agriculture combined with tourism, or in other words, agricultural tourism is becoming one of the most popular types of tourism in our country today. Based on the theory of regional linkages and qualitative surveys, the paper analyzes the aspects and necessary conditions of agri-tourism, thereby making meaningful comments and suggestions of principles to develop tourism in combination with agriculture of 13 provinces in Mekong Delta region effectively and sustainably.

Keyword: *agricultural tourism*

1. Overview of the Mekong Delta Region

Mekong Delta region is one of the six key economic regions of Vietnam, located in the southernmost part of Vietnam, the Northeast borders Ho Chi Minh City, the East and South borders the East Sea, the North borders Cambodia, and bordering the Gulf of Thailand to the west. It is a tropical monsoon region suitable for many crops and livestock. With a wide and interwoven system of rivers and canals, large and small canals are very convenient for supplying fresh water all year round, serving the needs of people's livelihood and agricultural production. According to Mekong Delta

Annual Economic Report 2020 (Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry - Can Tho, 2020) the average amount of water of the Mekong River flowing through the Mekong Delta region is more than 460 billion m³ and transporting about 150-200 million tons of alluvium, which is an extremely rich source of nutrients for the development of agriculture and seafood, the largest industry in the country. The natural area of the Mekong Delta is about four million ha, of which about 2.60 million ha (accounting for 65%) is used for agriculture and aquaculture development. In the agricultural land, more than 50% is land for growing annual crops, mainly rice land

* Selected from The National Conference "Regional Linkages in Developing High Quality Tourism Human Resources after Covid-19 pandemic" held in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam on 13rd May 2022

(accounting for over 90%). Land for specialized cultivation of crops and short-term industrial plants form about 150,000 ha, land for perennial crops accounts for over 320,000 ha, accounting for about 8.2% of the natural area. With that natural advantage, every year, the Mekong Delta provides more than 50% of rice production, 70% of fruit, contributing more than 90% of rice exports and nearly 60% of seafood export turnover for the whole country. This sector contributes more than 40.7% in the value of agro-forestry-fishery production, 53.4% of rice production, 70% of fruit production, 68.7% of aquatic products, and 90% of rice production and accounts for nearly 70% of seafood export turnover of the country. In the 2011-2020 period, the economic structure of the Mekong Delta has changed quite significantly. The share of sector 1 has decreased from 39.6% in 2010 to only 28.3% in 2019 - a dramatic change, outpacing the pace of structural shift in the previous two decades. Similarly, the structure of industry - construction and trade - service is also changing strongly, tending to be asymptotically compared to the economic structure of the whole country. However, the potential for structural transformation is not limited. With inherent natural characteristics, the agricultural structure of the Mekong Delta will always be higher than the national average, and the industrial proportion will also be significantly lower than that of the whole country.

1.1. Natural conditions

As for the natural conditions, the Mekong Delta region has relatively different sub-regions, including:

- Fruit growing areas along the Tien and Hau rivers in the provinces of Vinh Long, Dong Thap, Ben Tre, Tien Giang, Soc Trang, Tra Vinh and Can Tho city.
- Dong Thap Muoi wetland covering most of the provinces of Long An, Tien Giang and Dong Thap; and Long Xuyen Quadrangle in An Giang and Kien Giang.
- Coastal mangrove areas of Tien Giang, Ben Tre, Tra Vinh, Bac Lieu, Ca Mau, and Kien Giang provinces.
- The islands in the West Sea, the largest of which is Phu Quoc.

This difference is relative, due not only to natural features but also to geographical locations, development orientations and ways of exploiting local resources. Thus, it can be said that the natural resources of the Mekong Delta are relatively diverse, and it is possible to develop many types of products associated with diverse and rich natural conditions, suitable for designing different types of eco-tourism, experience (homestay). In geography guidebooks around the world, Mekong Delta is one of the names mentioned a lot, associated with the image of the vast delta created by the Mekong River. If this brand is better exploited, the Mekong Delta region will easily market the destination to international tourists.

1.2. Challenges

Currently, the agricultural sector in the Mekong Delta is facing many challenges, four of which are: Impact of climate change, impact of SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, impact of trade agreements of bilateral and multilateral free trade agreements, and the impact of Industry 4.0.

- The first challenge is the impact of

climate change. The Mekong Delta is one of three major deltas in the world threatened by sea level rise. The current urgency is not only to respond to climate change such as sea level rise, drought, flood, etc., but also to tackle the root cause of the subsidence of the Mekong Delta due to rampant groundwater exploitation, innocence. It is necessary to be aware of the new context of our country, which is the scarcity of fresh water, less flooding in the Mekong Delta, less aquatic resources, less sediment and poor water quality subsidence, erosion becoming more and more serious, and many uncertain factors appearing as well.

- The second challenge is the impact of the global SARS-CoV-2 pandemic over the past two years. Firstly, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic was right at a time when the global economy was vulnerable, and the economic cycle threatened to repeat. Governments did not have enough financial resources to intervene in the fiscal and economic sectors, and sufficient currency to stimulate the economy. Secondly, COVID-19 has spread globally. After a quarter since the discovery of COVID-19, the disease has spread to 188 countries and territories, with the epicenter moving first from China, spreading to countries in Asia, Europe, the Americas and the United States.

- The third challenge is Free Trade Agreements (FTAs). So far, Vietnam has signed more than 14 free trade agreements (FTAs) with regions and countries. FTAs require our country to revise the legal system, legal documents, etc in line with international standards and conventions. Moreover, businesses must change their

thinking and get used to them with international regulations and laws in trade and investment. As Vietnam's strides towards international recognition, it is important to address environmental and sustainability issues as these are often the request of importers and are also discussed, mentioned in the Free Trade Agreements (FTAs).

- Besides, the fourth challenge is the 4th industrial revolution (also known as the industrial revolution 4.0) which has also affected and impacted the agriculture and biotechnology industries through the Emerging technologies and broad-based innovation are diffused faster and more widely than in previous industrial revolutions. Today, all new developments and technologies have one thing in common: they take advantage of the pervasive power of digitization and information technology (Schwab, 2016, Dong Bich Ngoc, Nguyen Thi My Anh translated, 2018). All innovations are enabled and enhanced by the power of digital.

Tourism and related services (such as hotels, restaurants, transportation, etc.) are the sectors most directly impacted by the pandemic, especially attracting international tourists, in the context of the pandemic. Tourism has entered the peak season and the 4th wave of Covid-19 epidemic has appeared in many tourist centers across the country, while tourism is an industry with a very fast growth rate and accounts for an increasing proportion in the economy (about 10% of GDP). Besides, the situation of drought and salinity in the Mekong Delta increases the risks of the economy because experiences from the

recent economic-financial crises affecting countries around the world, including Vietnam, show that the agricultural sector plays a very important role in reducing shocks. Therefore, the close combination between agriculture and tourism to create more differences and diversify types of tourism create sustainable livelihoods, complement each other for local communities, increase the ability to attract tourists and develop both tourism and agriculture in the Mekong Delta, not just an individual locality, is an important issue that needs attention and encouragement for development in the right direction.

2. Overview of Vietnam's agricultural tourism

In the world, agricultural tourism has many different names, such as agritourism, agro-tourism, rural tourism, farm tours, etc. and is considered by many countries as the main type of tourism. Previously, the view that agriculture supported tourism was often through providing food and food for hotels, tourists, resorts, and entertainment. However, when urbanization is fast, large-scale, people's lives are more and more modern, the need to live close to nature, live in harmony with the landscape and environment of the countryside, increasingly returned to traditional agricultural activities. In addition, when people are more and more interested in health issues, they tend to desire to learn about the origin and production of everyday foods such as rice, fruit, meat, eggs, milk, etc. Admittedly, the rural environment with farming activities, animal husbandry, and the lives of the people are considered as a very good place for education about nature,

environment, culture and entertainment, and for those who live there in urban areas. It is also important that today the issues of protecting nature, the environment, ensuring food security, and sustainable development are receiving worldwide attention, awareness and understanding of people around the world (Tran Thi Kim Hang, 2018). The population has also grown up steeply, the tourism associated with protection, education about nature and environment, and supporting indigenous communities becomes more and more attractive. Such needs and contexts have given a rise to a new type of tourism called "agricultural tourism", which is considered a form of tourism in agricultural areas such as orchards, agroforestry farms, etc. combined, herbal farm and animal farm has been prepared catering to tourists. Tourists view or participate in agricultural practices such as working with farmer tools or harvesting crops without affecting the host family's ecology or productivity. A special new product is resting in organic farms, where visitors can learn more about nature and learn pesticide-free farming methods, etc. Beside agricultural tourism, there are other types of tourism such as eco-tourism, community-based tourism, resort tourism, medical tourism, etc.

Agricultural tourism in Vietnam, over the years, has developed with different names such as farm calendar, garden tourism, river tourism, craft village tourism, ecotourism, agricultural tourism, or even High-tech. Localities have begun to take advantage of the strengths of agriculture in combination with local culture to organize festivals and special agricultural tourism

programs. For instance, Da Lat City has voted and recognized 25 “high-tech agricultural tourism” in the city, including companies, farms and households with facilities, diversified products and quality tourism services. Southwestern provinces such as Dong Thap, An Giang, Tien Giang, and the like have formed 21 tourist attractions under the model of “Farmers doing tourism” with activities to experience harvesting products, homestay, and so on. In Ho Chi Minh City, a model of agricultural tourism has recently begun to form and attracts a large number of tourists, mostly students and parents, such as the Family Garden model in District 2 (now Ho Chi Minh City, Thu Duc), Green Noel, Legendary Orchid Garden in Cu Chi; sightseeing, sightseeing - career guidance in the City's high-tech agricultural zone. Ninh Thuan is a land with many difficulties, but in recent times, many agricultural tourism models have appeared such as Thai An grape village, farm. Ba Moi grapevine, Lam Son fruit garden, Nui Chua National Park, An Hoa shepherd field, lotus lake eco-cultural tourist area, etc. Although each model has had initial successes, it is not yet possible affirming the sustainability because most of them are spontaneous, independent, and separate activities, not yet connected to each other during the operation. On the other hand, tourism products at each destination are still quite simple, have not been properly invested, and have not met the needs of tourists.

Potentials and limitations of developing agricultural tourism

According to tourism experts, in recent years, Vietnam's tourism industry has

experienced a variety of tourism types, but agricultural tourism in Vietnam is still fragmented, spontaneous and has not been invested to develop properly with its potential and strengths for the following reasons:

- There is no specific planning for each locality to develop agricultural tourism and there is no general theoretical framework for the concepts of this type of tourism.

- Tourism is developing but not commensurating with its inherent potential. The development of agricultural tourism over time affects human life, nature, and the environment in the countryside in both positive and negative directions. They are mostly negative, polluting the environment, and variations arise from services that the State has not fully managed and has no solution to overcome.

- Because tourism development has not been linked with the locality, the natural resources exploited by the tourism industry are not effective and sustainable. Meanwhile, farmers in the countryside are still standing on the sidelines of the tourism industry's advocacy processes. Tourism activities only bring benefits to the State and the private sector.

- There has not been a good preparation of awareness for the authorities at all levels and local people have rural tourism resources so that they are ready to participate in this activity, thereby reducing the common evils such as attracting customers, providing poor quality products and services, gradually losing the cultural identity of the locality.

- Farmers are the ones who directly

bring their local tourism resources to tourism activities, but in reality, they do not benefit much from this activity.

3. Theory of regional linkage

Theoretically, inter-regional and inter-regional development linkage based on division of labor with different comparative advantages is a premise to improve the efficiency of regional development investment in general and public investment in particular.

The Mekong Delta region converges the characteristics of a subdivision: A territory with similar natural conditions and geographical location; conomic position and level of economic development are compatible; Features of similar development resources; The economic relations of social groups, enterprises, administrative units, etc. They together have the effect of promoting development or inhibiting the development of neighboring areas. How does the region differ from other regions? In other words, the comparative advantage of the region and each locality in the region. This shows that inter-regional relations in a region must optimize the added value for the region.

Research on regional development and regional linkage

Regarding the conditions for the implementation of sustainable regional linkages, regional and regional researchers around the world and the region are constantly adding to the theoretical and practical bases for regional development and regional linkage lasting. Capello and Walter (cited in Nguyen Van Huan, 2011) summarized the important facilities that create intra-regional and inter-regional

links as follows:

- Regional comparative advantages play an important role in shaping the system of division of labor and specialization, and thus forming intra- and inter-regional linkages. With the advantage of soil diversity, different ecological zones of sweet and salty, this is a strong point in taking advantage and exploiting the natural potentials that nature has bestowed on the Mekong Delta region.

- Scale advantage through specialization: The advantage due to the scale of spillover effects to other regions thanks to the usage of input materials and knowledge, skilled labor, etc. Market size and reduced transportation costs will form the industrial center clusters with clusters of industries linked together, or forming specialized agricultural areas associated with it are the processing industry, mechanical engineering, and services for agricultural development of the specialized area. The Mekong Delta region has outstanding characteristics in the development of agriculture, fisheries and seafood, has a typical production form of a freshwater production area with the largest rice granary and fruit-growing area in the country, a diversified aquaculture area. It is also a large fishing ground for seafood exploitation of our country. Consensus on institutions and social groups sharing common interests, including local development interests. Consensus between macro management and other micro-economic factors such as businesses and households, consensus between intra-regional and inter-regional, including inter-regional international.

- Synchronization of mechanisms, policies, institutional frameworks and regional governance in terms of: (i) ensuring property rights (both tangible and intangible), creating a framework for building and perform all kinds of contracts and provide sufficient information to the subjects; (ii) creating openness and transparency in the policies and operations of the public apparatus; and (iii) facilitating the participation of the population in policy making and implementation.

- The infrastructure system is developed synchronously and modernly with different types of infrastructure.

Infrastructure in many cases determines the success or failure of regional linkages and interregional. This is also a strong point of natural advantages in waterway transport but also a disadvantage for road transport development to connect resources in each locality, creating regional connectivity due to cost, infrastructure investment, high maintenance, and repair costs.

4. Assessment of conditions for developing inter-regional agricultural tourism in the Mekong Delta

According to the statistics of localities in the region, the tourism development situation in 2019 brought the following results:

Table 1. Number of visitors and tourism revenue of Mekong Delta provinces/cities in 2019

Local	Total number of visitors (Million)	Number of international visitors (Thousand)	Turnover (Billion VND)
An Giang	9,2	120	5.500
Cần Thơ	8,9	410	4.400
Kiên Giang	8,8	714	22.000
Đồng Tháp	4,0	86	1.051
Bạc Liêu	2,5	73.5	2.308
Sóc Trăng	2,4	90	1.020
Tiền Giang	2,1	850	1.160
Bến Tre	1,9	800	1.791
Long An	1,8	23.5	782
Cà Mau	1,7	29	2.500
Vĩnh Long	1,5	215	525
Trà Vinh	1,0	30	359
Hậu Giang	0,5	25	172
Total	46,3	3.466	43.568

(Source: Department of Tourism; Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism; Department of Culture, Information, Sports and Tourism of 13 provinces/cities in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry - Can Tho, 2020)

Based on this statistic, it can be seen that the number of visitors is larger than the

tourism statistics of the whole region. However, based on infrastructure, tourism

services and number of accommodation rooms, the reported data of some localities may not be compatible with their actual capacity to receive guests. Infact, the province receiving the most tourists is An Giang (9.2 million arrivals) and the province with the highest tourism revenue is Kien Giang (VND 22,000 billion). The provinces/cities that attract the most tourists due to their variety of tourism products, or their unique tourism products, include An Giang where is a pilgrimage, Kien Giang where is Phu Quoc island, and Can Tho where is a place to stay with night service. The localities with high revenue are largely due to understanding the most important stages in the tourism value chain: accommodation, shopping and night activities. It is estimated that in 2019, the Mekong Delta welcomed about 3.4 million international visitors, of which only 1.6 million (46%) were in-house guests. In the list of provinces and cities that receive the most international visitors, there are only two provinces in the Mekong Delta, Kien Giang (12th) and Can Tho (15th).

Obviously, the conditions for developing agricultural tourism products, compared with the characteristics of 13 provinces in the Mekong Delta, can be seen as:

- In terms of natural resources: The natural tourism resource environment is a rural area with the following conditions: Favorable geographical location (convenient for tourism development such as waterway transport with the interlaced rivers and canals). The climate is mild, suitable for tourism activities, tourism and agricultural production which can be exploited all year round; the terrain is

diverse, including the terrain of hills, plains, seas, rivers and the likewith rich and attractive flora and fauna. According to studies on rural tourism, the necessary natural conditions for the development of agricultural tourism are natural landscapes that have not yet had much impact on urbanization, but still have “characteristic countryside” and rural agriculture industry which is gradually modernizing; The life and activities of rural residents are quiet and peaceful, etc. These factors are not found at all in urban areas where industry is developed. In addition, the unique cultural and traditional features andthe lands with a long history of formation are the places where many historical relics are kept and the customs, traditions and practices of the ancients, etc are necessary and sufficient conditions for agricultural tourism development.

With favorable conditions in terms of road, river, sea and even air routes (although still limited), the 13 provinces in the Mekong Delta have not yet completed synchronous transport infrastructure, but all have necessary elements. Indeed, the road transport system is increasingly completed and distributed evenly throughout the Mekong Delta region. Afterwards, the bridges connecting provinces such as Rach Mieu bridge, Ham Luong bridge, Co Chien bridge, Can Tho bridge, Cao Lanh bridge, and the like were completed and put into use; some localities such as Ben Tre and Tra Vinh were able to break them, isolate and create a smooth road to Ho Chi Minh City and connect with other provinces in the region. On the other hand, connecting the expressways of Ho Chi Minh City - Trung

Luong, Trung Luong - Can Tho, the Tien and Hau River systems create a rich network of rivers and canals with the main river systems facing the East Sea. In addition, the 13 provinces of the Mekong Delta are mainly agricultural provinces with the strengths of the garden economy and the marine economy. These are the advantages that are exploited in agritourism as well as in community tourism.

- In terms of human resources: traditional customs and practices along with historical and cultural relics, traditional festivals, craft villages, cuisine, folk art, etc. have been creating unique, diverse and rich features for the Mekong Delta region and this is also a feature that tourists are very interested in and love. The Mekong Delta is a new land, so the vestiges of history, the imprints of monuments, historical architecture and religion are not many compared to the Central and Northern regions. However, the human resources in the Mekong Delta have a big difference. It can be seen that there are unique characteristics such as hamlets - hamlets without separate rows of bamboo, built along rivers, canals, and floating markets on the river form a unique western river culture in the country; Khmer culture with many ancient temples found in most of the Mekong Delta provinces, most concentrated in Soc Trang and Tra Vinh; major festivals of community, cultural and religious activities of the year of the three ethnic groups Kinh, Hoa and Khmer, of which the most attractive is the Ngo boat racing festival taking place at the end of October; The types of music of the Vietnamese people such as "dan ca tai tu"

and the five syllables of the Khmer people are only found in this land.

All tangible and intangible human resources have created extremely valuable materials for designing and creating diverse community tourism, cultural and spiritual tourism products in the Mekong Delta. This is a factor that meets the province's human resource conditions.

- In terms of physical and technical conditions for tourism (for agricultural tourist attractions): It is the physical base serving the operational criteria as well as the operation of the attraction as well as suitable for the purpose of tourism, for the essential needs of tourists such as safe sightseeing model, convenient means of transportation in the sightseeing area (including on foot or by boat), places to eat, drink, rest, clean toilets, places of entertainment, and other services that meet the essential needs of visitors at a tourist attraction. The Mekong Delta region has advantages with 38 wholesale markets for agricultural products. Obviously, the variety of fruit trees in the Mekong Delta is quite rich. Many types of trees are selected and imported such as Hoa Loc mango, Chu mango; Thailand, Taiwan mango; Ri 6 durian, Cai Mon durian, Mon Thong durian; rambutan longan, Java rambutan; Green skin pomelo, Nam Roi pomelo, Lo Ren milk fruit, Thailand jackfruit, etc. have been accepted by the market and brought about high economic efficiency. In addition, the majority of fruit farmers in the region have a high level of cultivation and high efficiency. Regarding this condition, the Mekong Delta provinces have also made a lot of investment efforts to create attraction

as well as differentiators. However, compared to the requirements set forth, this is still one of the limitations, in which, the most important is the professionalism in services provided to tourists and the standards of hygiene and food safety for the cuisine of river tourism.

- In terms of social infrastructure: It is a system of roads including waterways, roads and airways, ensuring convenience for travel; a system of communication, water supply and drainage; clean water source; garbage collection, and a treatment system to ensure hygiene and environmental protection. In fact, this still has some limitations due to the impact of climate change; therefore, in recent years, the situation of salinization and drought in the dry season is quite stressful or the problem of collection, treatment waste management to meet environmental requirements for some provinces in the Mekong Delta. Furthermore, the issue of prevention and control of the SARS-CoV-2 epidemic now as well as in the near future has a strong impact on provinces as well as countries with borders close to the Mekong Delta provinces, causing many concerns and threats to epidemics from regions that share a common border.

- In terms of human resources and organization: To attract tourists, it is necessary to have a healthy natural and social environment. This requires the locality, the tourism organization unit to pay attention to the construction and good management of the community where the tourist attraction is organized, and at the same time, to increase the sense of participation of each individual in the

tourism activities that joint work. This is also a limitation of agritourism activities because professionalism and soft skills in the field of tourism have not been effectively deployed in tourist destinations, especially homestays. Regarding human resources, from 2010 to now, the quality of human resources in the Mekong Delta has improved quite rapidly; however, the proportion of trained workers in the region is still low compared to the whole country, hence there is a large difference between the two provinces/cities in the region. Currently, up to 93.4% of laborers do not have vocational certificates, only 1.4% of workers with elementary qualifications, 2.2% of intermediate level, 0.9% of college and two of university, just 1%. The labor rate in agriculture, forestry and fishery has decreased, but it is still slower than the whole country. The whole Mekong Delta region has 15 universities, 35 colleges, and more than 180 professional high schools and vocational training centers.

5. The perspective of agricultural development combined with tourism

In order to develop tourism in combination with agriculture in a sustainable way, as well as to promote the effectiveness of this type of agricultural tourism, it is necessary to note some of the following points of view:

- There is a need for a harmonious combination between agricultural production activities combined with tourism and residential communities to bring about a sustainable tourism standard, towards the development of diversified agricultural activities and types of services while maintaining quality and protecting

the environment, maintaining the ecosystem, and at the same time improving the quality of life of local residents, as well as preserving and promoting the local cultural identity. Particularly, it is necessary to create conditions for local people to participate as subjects to jointly attach responsibilities and interests to the development of localities and businesses.

- It is necessary to apply the principles of sustainable agricultural production and tourism development, combining environmental protection, sustainable economic development and preservation of local cultural identity.

- Localities in the Mekong Delta need to unify with a purpose of finding out their own characteristics and tourism-agriculture products, creating a difference between localities, and hence attracting tourists. Coastal provinces can create types of tourism to experience, learn about aquaculture (Soc Trang, Tra Vinh, Bac Lieu, Kien Giang, Ca Mau), types of tourism to learn about creatures landscapes (Tien Giang, Dong Thap, An Giang), types of tourism to learn about fruit trees (Long An, Tien Giang, Dong Thap, Hau Giang, An Giang), combined with conversion applications digital, artificial intelligence (AI), platform applications (Platform) to create uniqueness, difference as well as improve the efficiency of visitors' experience with local tourism products. Linkage must be evident in the contents and themes of each local tourism products.

Although there is no official research information on tourist characteristics for agritourism, it is possible to refer to information from community tourists

because there are some similarities with the field of tourism. Furthermore, because the Mekong Delta region with its water rice civilization has existed since its inception, agricultural sector has a very high community character. According to the Center for Responsible Tourism (CREST) and other tourism experts, important characteristics of CBT tourists are: Respect for natural values, history and culture and attractions, Interest in environmental impacts of tourism and sustainability, Preference of small-scale accommodation of locals, Search for authentic aspects of life: local specialties, rustic and natural design, elements imbued with local traditions, Interaction with people who have different lifestyles and cultures, highly education, a relatively high income, Not being attracted to mass marketing (The Asia Foundation and the Vietnam Rural Industries Research and Development Institute, 2012).

Some of the main types of services that can be provided to tourists are training of local guides, transportation, meals, accommodation/ staying, handicraft sales, cultural performances, local culture (dancing, singing, story telling, etc.), cultural identities and ways of performing (weaving, farming, music, crafting, cooking, etc.)

6. Some suggestions to promote inter-regional agricultural tourism in the Mekong Delta region

Some issues when building inter-regional agricultural tourism models in Mekong Delta provinces:

- Planning for expansion and development of agricultural production areas must be closely linked with

agricultural tourism planning to ensure active and sustainable development orientation for agricultural tourism activities in each region and in the future of the whole Mekong Delta region.

- Building tourism products on the basis of agricultural activities and traditional occupations, local cultural identity.

- Actively link and expand to develop and ensure fairness for participating actors, bringing benefits to local people.

- Always innovate and make a difference on the basis of meeting the needs, and at the same time orienting the needs of visitors.

- Building an integrated model, taking agriculture as the center and developing surrounding services such as tourism, vocational training, entertainment, commerce, etc.

- Improving necessary qualifications and skills for people doing agricultural tourism such as public speaking skills, foreign language skills, skills for the tourism department. Moreover, training standards and professionalism of tourists is also needed

- Agricultural tourism activities need the attention of both the tourism and agricultural sectors, along with the participation of all levels, sectors, and the business community.

- It is necessary to cooperate with Ho Chi Minh City in training human resources, applying technology to agricultural production and tourism services, diversifying types of tourism, promoting and building tours according to the needs of the local community. Each topic could include craft village tourism, tourism -

high-tech agriculture, tourism in the form of farm tour, and the like.

In general, in order to bring into a full play of the efficiency of combined agriculture for tourism development, create a breakthrough, and promote the development of tourism combined with agriculture, at the regional scale, it is necessary to have a strategy and plan. It is important to plan on building unique agricultural tourism products for each locality as well as promoting suitable tourism products to each target group of tourists, promoting IT applications such as applications of digital transformation, intelligence artificial intelligence (AI), platform applications (Platform) to make a difference, unique in each locality in the region; to step up investment in the development of transport and social infrastructure systems for localities with potential for agricultural tourism development; regularly open training courses to guide people on how to do tourism. Besides, it is necessary to strengthen the link between tourism companies and gardeners; encourage and support start-up agritourism models. In particular, it is necessary to change the mindset about the market economy, accept to cope with risks and challenges as well as adapt to changes in state management agencies as well as businesses and associations. association, producer. These issues are reflected in the organization, management and administration of production, business, tourism as well as the way to deploy drastic, powerful and meaningful solutions and policies as blows, feasibly, and effectively. This will have an

impact on creating inspiration for innovative activities in agricultural tourism, bringing material and spiritual values to customers, as well as bringing practical benefits for people in the Mekong Delta provinces.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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